

# A Study of Taizé

## Individuality and Community



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*“By its very nature, our prayer is not just before God, but when we pray together, it’s a prayer that we share with the others who are there [...]. We want to say that the presence of others helps me to pray. To think of others, to make room for the others who come to our prayers helps me make room for God.”*  
*(Brother Jean-Marie)*



## Foreword

First of all I wish to thank the brothers of the Taizé-community for allowing me to trespass. For simply allowing me to pull up a recording device at inappropriate times and ask you all sorts of difficult questions in the midst of other pilgrims. Although I didn't come for spiritual reasons myself, my whole project is perhaps based upon a spiritual quest. *Why do people believe? Why do they worship?* Meeting spiritual pilgrims allowed me to peek into the window of a strangers house, and find a story perhaps similar to my own.

A very special thanks to br. Stephen for all your practical help (powerplugs make a huge difference!) and for good conversations, to br. Jean-Marie for your insight and openness, and to br. Alois for talking to me about peace, - it lit a fire in my heart.

To my informants, whom I unfortunately cannot name here; I owe you great thanks, not just for your time, but for allowing me to pry into your most personal experiences. As I have worked through the interviews I have discovered that we have shared some really deep conversations. These experiences have always intrigued me.

Thanks to the volunteers and pilgrims whom I met in Taizé.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

When I was accepted onto the Master's degree programme in Musicology at Oslo University (UiO) I was asked to write back to the faculty with a proposition of my Master's thesis. Up until that moment I had not given a thought as to what I was going to write about, but, although it was a jump start, the answer came quite naturally to me. I am from a religious background and my BA is built up from classes in both music and religion, as well as some literature and aesthetics. It is quite a mix, but it comes together wonderfully for this thesis. I wanted to write about the relationship between music and religion, how music can be an expression of faith, and how music can be a catalyst to a religious experience.

I have a never-ending curiosity when it comes to weird religious stuff. *Weird* in this sense means the things that are hard to explain, and it also simply means *different from what I'm used to*. Ever since I was young, I have always been interested in other religions, how they worship, pray and practise their faith. And I've always been sceptical (and in many cases critical) of my own environment and the institutionalisation that characterises much of Christianity. Even from an early age I started investigating people's basis for their own faith or lack of faith. I wanted to learn about their religious experiences. "Have you met God? How? How would you explain him? When? What is he like to you?", and so forth. And growing up within a church setting I have seen the profound effects that religious music has on worshippers, how it can change the atmosphere of a room to include a state of consciousness that expands far beyond the limits of the self. Music is undeniably an important part of religious rite, and it's a powerful medium. But whose medium is it? Who communicates what? What intentions are behind its staging?

The role of intention and identity is one that I have focused on in this thesis. How does the individual experience the worship ritual? And what effect does the surroundings have on that experience? The individual experience is undeniably influenced by the community that surrounds it. To what extent, and how aware the worshipper is of that influence, is another theme that I wish to explore. As a religious person myself, I revel in



finding academic theories to the mysteries I see in religious practises. The field of religious phenomenology explains and expands this territory. I will attempt to explore some of these categories within the case study of Taizé.

This thesis is a natural elongation of my curiosity. It questions what happens within the churchroom, what the intentions are and what effects this has on the individual. Music is the means. It's the subject I know best, it's an excellent conversation-starter, and it involves our emotions in a very powerful way.

## **1.1 Limits and scope of this project**

My experience with in-depth research theories was quite limited when I started this project, and in the beginning I wanted to compare all the religions in the world, finding similarities and differences and coming up with a revealing insight as to how religious experiences with music as a catalyst compare. My aim was to advocate for tolerance between segregated religious groups, pointing to the things we have in common, not the things that separate us. Discussions with my professor brought me down to earth as to the limits and the scope that I could expect in a master thesis. I was encouraged to choose one, or a maximum of two religious communities to study, and seeing how the tradition of ethnomusicology is to study cultures in depth, I now realise that anything more would be far too shallow. So I chose Taizé, for several reasons. First of all, Taizé managed to spark my curiosity. Taizé was (as far as I knew then) an interesting new religious “thing”, that had drawn the attention of hundreds of thousands of teenagers, with simple songs and silence involved. It was also a religious community, more exactly a monastic community in France. Taizé was first brought to my attention because of the music used at prayers. Their simplicity and the elongated periods of silence was something very different from the Pentecostal revivals that from time to time ride Christian youth work in Norway. In fact, Taizé is a clear contrast to these types of movements. So how could it be that these quiet monks are so successful in their approach to young people? I first met

brother<sup>1</sup> Stephen from the Taizé community while I was in my last year of BA, studying in part at the Faculty of Theology at the UiO. He came to the faculty for an informal lunch-interview along with a Taizé prayer at the faculty chapel. Whilst I did not attend the prayer, I did meet him at lunchtime, and I asked him how it could be that this movement, with its periods of silence and simple songs could draw in so many teenagers from all over the world. And he answered me then (in my own words here), that he believed our world is so filled with input, from computers, music-players, tv, etc. that silence is just what we need to really listen. It is what the young people need. This meeting sparked my curiosity further, and in time I chose to focus my masterthesis on Taizé. What I was not aware of at that time, was that Taizé would be the one community that has worked integration and multiculturalism to great success, and their methods can be applied to increase tolerance between segregated groups, as was my aim with cross-cultural research.

Now I must say that there are probably many young people in Norway and abroad who know a lot more about Taizé than I do. As written previously, I first heard about it a couple of years ago. And since that time I have met many young people who have spent more time at Taizé than I probably ever will. This has its pros and cons for the purpose of this thesis. The cons are mainly that my knowledge is limited. I have not seen how this community has developed over time, neither have I been a part of this community. I don't know the full scope of Taizés' theology or religious traditions, nor even its day to day practises. The pros are that my knowledge is focused. I have seen and worked with Taizé only in the light of academic research. This allows me to have a more appropriate emotional distance to the religious phenomena than perhaps someone who is part of the religious community. I would say that I am more objective, but my objectivity is also limited by the fact that I am a Christian myself, and thus belong to the larger Christian community. Being a Christian however, I am well experienced to Christian discourse, and that allows me an ease of communication about the phenomena accounted for which I will try to explain to the reader.

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<sup>1</sup> The monks that belong to the Taizé community are referred to as brothers, short br., or frère, short fr., in French.

## 1.2 Ethnographic Setting

There may be a confusion about the definition of Taizé, as the name involves several different meanings. The name Taizé is used to label both a specific prayer<sup>2</sup> ritual and the place from which this prayer originated. Taizé-prayers are held in several different countries and on every continent, the inspiration springing from an ecumenical Christian monastery<sup>3</sup> in Burgundy, France; the Taizé-community<sup>4</sup>. Taizé is single order, with some small fraternities spread out across the world. A local interest group may organise prayers outwith the community, or, for the larger meetings, brothers from the community travel and cooperate with locals to organise both the prayers and how to welcome travellers. The prayers are held in the worship-style found in the monastery, and aim to express the visions and values of the community. Looking at these visions and values is part of what this thesis will incorporate in its analysis. As the monastery is the source of this concept, I will introduce the reader to that first.

### 1.2.1 Taizé, the community

A quick search on an internet search engine will bring about three to four options for Taizé in France. The subject of this study is located in Saône-et-Loire, Burgundy in mid-south France. It is a small village, the reason for its later fame being due to the many pilgrims that travel to the community. It was here that brother Roger, the founder of the community, settled in 1940. The name Taizé belongs to the village, but when pilgrims use the name they also refer to the community, which isn't so odd, seeing how most of the village buildings belong to the community. The place and its activity are quite inseparable. I travelled to Taizé in January 2011, perhaps the most quiet time of the year as far as pilgrims are concerned. There were only around thirty guests, a quite untypical

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<sup>2</sup> The prayer ritual in Taizé is part of a liturgy of hours; held three times a day in the community. Individual prayers, f.ex. on a Friday night may be held not as a part of a liturgy of hours, but is none the less referred to as a prayer in Taizé.

<sup>3</sup> The term monastery is generally used to denote the buildings of a community of monks (Wikipedia [online]).

<sup>4</sup> Taizé communauté is the French title, which I will refer to at times.

time for a community fitted for five to six thousand guests. Peak periods for Taizé visitors are Easter, Pentecost and summer, and at these times the community is transformed to accommodate more pilgrims using the outdoor space. In January, however, most activities are indoors and the activity level is at a minimum.

Br. Roger was the founder and the first Prior<sup>5</sup> in the community. He was tragically murdered in 2005 by a mentally ill person, and since then br. Alois has been the Prior and the head of the community. The community consists of about one hundred monks, from approximately thirty different nationalities. Some of these live in fraternities or travel quite a bit, so at the time I was in Taizé communauté there were about seventy to eighty brothers present. In addition to this, there are also three fraternities of sisters who stay at Taizé communauté for some time, to help out with the female visitors.

The community welcomes visitors to the monastery, a tradition that has been upheld since the very beginning, when br. Roger welcomed Jewish war refugees, and then later German prisoners of war. However, it was at the end of the Sixties and the beginning of the Seventies that visitors started coming in greater numbers, forcing the brothers to take action as to whether to facilitate and welcome these visitors or ask them to leave. Today, visitors are normally welcomed for a week in the monastery; they stay in dormitories that have been built or camp outside. It is possible to stay for a further week, but this has to be arranged with a brother or sister, and most of the time it will be for staying in silence<sup>6</sup>. Young people wishing to stay longer may join the volunteers<sup>7</sup>, which also has to happen through conversations with the brothers or sisters. Taizé attracts pilgrims from all over the world, and thus the most common language used is English. However, there will be a number of different languages used at any time in Taizé, making it a particular international community.

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<sup>5</sup> The Prior of Taizé is the monastic superior, the head of the community.

<sup>6</sup> Staying in silence in Taizé is a spiritual exercise which consist of very limited communication with others and limited input from all media, with the purpose of listening intently to God.

<sup>7</sup> The volunteers in Taizé are young people aged 18-30 who wishes to stay for some time to help the brothers welcome visitors in the community. Some of the young men may in time choose to enter the brotherhood.



The core of the community is the prayers, announced by the Bell Tower three times a day; morning, afternoon and evening. At these times, everything else shuts down, everyone leaves their work and makes their way towards the Church of Reconciliation, the central building in the community, a building that has been expanded to accommodate a growing mass of pilgrims (Santos 2008). The brothers sit in the centre of the main church hall, and a low artificial hedge-row separates them from the visitors, who come mostly to participate in the prayers. A programme has been made to welcome the visitors, with prayers, meals, Bible introduction and work. The visitors are expected to partake in all parts of this programme. However, there are no paid staff at Taizé, only the young volunteers that help out. Thus the visitors have to partake in the daily chores that keep the community running, such as cooking, food distribution, and cleaning.

### **1.2.2 Taizé prayers outwith the community**

Many of the visitors in Taizé in France have been introduced to the community by Taizé-prayers or Taizé-retreats in their hometown or homecountry. These prayers and retreats will be kept trying to reflect the community and its values, and will be arranged similarly to those in the monastery. That means that they follow the format of prayer in the community, with the particular Taizé-songs, with simplicity, and elongated periods of silence. They also include some of the decoration<sup>8</sup> from the community, or at least an attempt to reconstruct some of the decoration.

Lia Gård is a retreatcentre in Norway that arranges a weekend Taizé-retreat once a year, since the year 2000. Lia Gård is successful in recreating some of the atmosphere in the community due to several things. It is placed in a quiet area in Østerdalen, literally meaning Eastern Valley, that offers great natural surroundings as a frame to the experience. It has a small chapel that is filled with the decoration that is typical for Taizé during the retreat. The retreatcentre is similar to a monastery in its construction, with a

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<sup>8</sup> The decoration includes some religious symbols, but most of the decoration has an open symbolic meaning to it, and aids the creation of a pleasant atmosphere. I will discuss this more thoroughly below.

main building that consists of the chapel, long rows of bedrooms and a hall for meals. In addition there are several other houses, and a barn that is furnished for human use, - involving another rather large meal-hall. In Lia Gård the rhythm of the day is very similar to that in a monastery with prayers three times a day, - this also happens outwith the retreats.

I went to Lia Gård for the first Taizé-retreat in March 2010, my first research, and really my first meeting with Taizé, quite typically far away from the Taizé community itself. Two brothers attended the retreat, br. Stepen and br. Norbert, along with 84 guests. My first impression of the prayers was the mixture between simplicity and beauty. This was not the kind of simplicity where everything is stripped to a minimum, just the opposite, quite an effort had been made into the decoration and creation of a warm atmosphere, but a simplicity in words, stripped of suggestive speaking, culminating in a complete absence of words in the silence. What I have later discovered through interviews is that the Taizé prayers leave room for an individual experience to take place through this simplicity, and at the very same time, in that simple prayer, one of peoples' strongest experiences is that of fellowship. I returned for a second retreat in March 2011, meeting up with br. Stephen, who was on his own this time.

As part of the Pilgrimage of Trust on Earth<sup>9</sup>, Taizé arranged a series of meetings in Norway, in Oslo first and afterwards in Trondheim in September 2010. I attended the prayers that were held over the weekend in Oslo Cathedral (Oslo Domkirke). Taizé meetings in larger cities are not uncommon as the brothers travel across the world to spread their values and visions. What is uncommon is the number of people that travel to attend to these meetings, even from different countries, and the character of openness and sharing that they invoke.

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<sup>9</sup> The Pilgrimage of Trust on Earth was first vocalised in 2007, as a meeting with Christ and with others. People that attend Taizé happenings are encouraged to partake on a journey of trust; "to overcome barriers and differences in order to welcome and enrich one another" (Taizé [online]). This is particularly encouraged between segregated groups, such as Croatians and Serbians (ibid.)

### 1.3 Theoretical Background

During my first year of studying musicology at a master level, I struggled to find a lot of research carried out in my field of interest, only subtle hints here and there as I was reading. I now realise that “my field” involves, in part, several other fields within musicology. To a small extent it involves churchmusic, but I have been intrigued to see how music therapy is perhaps the field where I’ve found the most interesting research. And I have also learned that the “weird religious stuff” belongs to a field called anthropology. And now I’m starting to see how many of these fields are interrelated, both in terms of theories and methods.

First of all I will place this thesis firmly in the field of ethnomusicology. Ethnomusicology “is the division of musicology in which special emphasis is given to the study of music in its cultural context – the anthropology of music” (Myers 1992:3). The term ethnomusicology is widely discussed and has been redefined several times throughout its history. The interest in non-western music springs out from the voyages of discovery in the early 15th century (ibid.), hereby the studies of “other cultures” which is central to the earlier definitions of ethnomusicology. The German term *vergleichende Musikwissenschaft* has been used to describe the field, but was replaced in 1950 “on the grounds that comparison is not the principal distinguishing feature of this work” (ibid.). The field is rather determined by the relationship between music and culture. Nettl discusses this point further, saying that “It is difficult to find a single, simple definition, to which most people in this field would subscribe, and thus ethnomusicologists have been perhaps excessively concerned with defining themselves” (Nettl 2005:4). Nettl nevertheless gives a suggestion of different definitions found within ethnomusicology, listing eight different alternatives:

“(1) folk music, and music that used to be called “primitive,” that is, tribal, indigenous, or possibly ancient music; (2) non-Western and folk music; (3) all music outside the investigator’s own culture; (4) all music that lives in oral tradition; (5) all music of a given locality...; (6) the music that given population groups regard as their particular property, for example “black” music of the United States; (7) all contemporary music (Chase 1958); and (8) all human music” (Nettl 2005:4)

Given these alternatives, tying down one definition seems like quite a task, but some of them are quite useful. For this thesis, the music is definitely outside my own culture, has a given locality, and is regarded as the particular property of, perhaps not an ethnic group, but a community. The given locality is also a point to be discussed as Taizé's music is to be found in multiple locations, each of them referring to the original locality, which is Taizé.

These theories are now quite outdated, ethnocentric as they are, and what has evolved is a multitude of different approaches that can be discussed, along with the question of whether ethnomusicology really is a field in and of itself, or rather a junk definition of several related fields with the common denominator of studying music in its cultural context. It may be more useful to place this project into a subgroup of religious music in a monastic tradition, or repeated chanting in religious tradition, or the study of the effects of worship in the individual, and so forth. But none of these cut to the core in defining this particular study. Rather I find that C. Geertz theory of the ritual as a window to the culture is an ethnomusicological tradition that I can ascribe to (Bell 1992). Steven Feld (1990) used this approach when studying the Kaluli expression. He gives an elaborate analysis of how one song expresses family relationships, gender relationships, worldview and ethos of the Kaluli. Through analysing their creative productions, Feld discovered in these productions an accumulation of cultural expectations. With this study however, I have aimed to prod the personal and interpersonal experiences at a deeper level, and in particular how these experiences relate to religion. It is the individual in the community that is of great interest here. Seeger (1987:128) writes that; "Singing enabled individuals to create and express certain aspects of self, it established and sustained a feeling of euphoria characteristic of ceremonies, and it related the present to the powerful and transformative past". It is particularly the last part of this phrase that I find interesting as it links to what Eliade (1987) identified as the re-enactment of mythological time. The powerful and transformative past for the Christian culminates in the death and resurrection of Christ, and amongst other things I aim to study how the vocal music of Taizé and their prayer rituals enables the individual to relate to that past. Thus the prayer ritual will be a window to understanding the worldview and values seen in Taizé.



A further development in the field of anthropology is that of practise theory, a strand that I have found particularly useful to understand such issues as influence and intention. Practise theory involves a number of interrelated terms, such as practise, praxis, action, interaction, activity, experience, performance, and the do-er of such things, called agent, actor, person, self, individual, and subject (Ortner 1984:144). This closes in on what I am studying within Taizé. As Bourdieu launched his *Outline of a Theory of Practise* in 1972, the discussion had focused on studying the individual within its habitus, and the profound effect that this structure has on the individual. Ortner identifies the Marxist influence on the study of structures, “in the assumption that the most important forms of action or interaction for analytic purposes are those which take place in asymmetrical or dominated relationships, that it is these forms of action or interaction that best explain the shape of any given system at any given time” (Ortner 1984:147). As practise theory focuses its study on human actions, these human actions are seen within a particular political framework of asymmetrical social relations. Studying social relations in the light of dominance is particularly important in a religious structure and unavoidable for this thesis. However, Ortner points to a rather undeveloped side of this discussion, namely the “Patterns of cooperation, reciprocity, and solidarity [that] constitute the other side of the coin for the social being” (ibid. 157), and it is in this duality that the pattern of the community at hand is best understood.

As the focus that I have chosen in this study is on the individual within the community, I’ve found that this project tangents the field of music therapy. It is within this field, that is closely related to ethnomusicology, that I have found studies on the relationship between music and identity, identity and religion. These studies have helped to define the profound effects that musical and religious experiences have on the individual. Even Ruud (2009) identifies several ways in which music is closely linked to how people perceive their own identity. Ruud labels a series of strong individual experiences as “the transpersonal room” (2009), the common denominator being that these experiences function to alter the individuals perspective on the self and its connections to a community. These experiences are anchored outwith the self, they are groundbreaking

and they place the individual within a greater dimension, as part of something much larger than the self (Ruud 2009:175). If we apply Ruud's research to a more religious aspect we can discover some of the meaning of worship music. The connections to a community of common values, such as Taizé, or even the connection to a universality of the church, as many have expressed within Taizé, are experiences that may serve to alter the individuals' practises and worldview. Furthermore, Ruud writes that such experiences are "beyond the close time and space dimensions" (Ruud 2009:175, my translation). If we link this statement up to that of a Christian worldview, then the time and space dimensions may extend even beyond that of reality. What I am trying to get to here is what could be called "a glimpse of eternity" in a Christian discourse, a feeling of connection and communication with God. Such an experience would certainly have an effect on the identity of the worshipper, and it is this experience that prayer rituals in Taizé facilitate. Linda Myers et al. takes the argument a step further in their article on identity development when they state that "[...] identity development is a process of integrating and expanding one's sense of self" (Myers et al. 1991: 54). As such experiences expand the self, then they are part of a positive identity development. The article builds upon Myers "optimal conceptual system, [where] self-worth is assumed intrinsic in being", and states that "People are worthy because they are unique expressions of spiritual energy. [...] The purpose of life and its meaning come into clearer focus as human beings recognize how self is connected with all of life" (Myers et al. 1991:56). The authors attempt to tackle the issue of oppression in the article, claiming that oppression comes from a conceptual system, where "self-worth is based primarily on external validation", as opposed to "intrinsic feelings of worth and value" (ibid.), that comes from a spiritual-material unity. The oppression mentioned in this article "manifests itself at all levels of experience: the intrapersonal, interpersonal (e.g., groups, family, organizations), institutional, and the sociocultural" (ibid.) resulting in -isms, such as racism, sexism, and ageism. And thus the relevance of this thesis emerges.

We now live in a world where the flow of information is immense, and where cultures live and cross in a larger world like threads woven in a carpet. Many of the larger cities are a mix of nationalities, skin colours, religions, cultures and worldviews that struggle to

coexist. People move, travel, are influenced and change. We can shop around for religious beliefs in metropolitan cities where almost anything can be found. Ethnic groups are no longer isolated, but communicate and travel, and they partake in the larger society. Albeit a wonderful prerogative to be part of a global society, it does create immense political and social challenges. “The multicultural society in Germany has utterly failed”, Angela Merkel stated according to BBC News (Merkel [online]), a statement that sadly reflects much of Europe's general feeling when it comes to integration. Instead of integration, we find segregation, and particularly between the secular world and the Muslim values. I stated above that when I started working on this thesis, I wanted to compare all the religions in the world to come up with a thesis as to how religious experiences with music as a catalyst compare. I wanted to study the similarities by means of personal experiences to create a greater respect for religious experiences across religious boundaries. My initial theory was that these experiences were similar, not depending so much on which religion they belong to, but rather that they were very personal in nature. As I said, this task is too much for a master thesis. But I did find one religious society that tackles the question of integration and respect to a breathtaking level. Being based on a struggle for reconciliation, the Taizé community takes this struggle and expands it beyond Christianity. I believe the study of how and why they do this, is of immense value in our multicultural world.

## **1.4 Method and Analysis**

Even as I have discussed the different fields that this project tangents, the methods of research are not that different in these fields, the qualitative interviews and the observation being common for both ethnomusicology and music therapy. The largest amount of data comes from these two methods. However, as written above, the ritual can be used as a window to the culture. In Taizé, both the prayers and community life can be characterised as ritualistic. The ritual analysis will focus more on the prayers, but also take into account that which happens outwith. The prayers of Taizé consist of a large

amount of vocal music. And thus both the musical expression and the lyrics will be discussed as part of the data.

### **1.4.1 Qualitative interviews**

The majority of the empiri for this thesis rests on qualitative interviews. It is only through investigating the personal processes and reflections around the prayers and rituals that I can get to the core of the spiritual experiences for these individuals; how do they experience the prayers and why do they participate in them; and what effect does the community have on the individuals? Through interviews I can observe their thought processes and reflections. With the qualitative interviews that I have done, I have investigated how the music influenced peoples' experience of Taizé, and in particular their religious experiences. I do not aim to tackle the question of Gods existence in an academic research. My aim is to explore religious peoples personal accounts of their experiences. I have conducted four in-depth interviews with people attending Taizé, and in addition to that I have recorded several conversations with three of the brothers from the Taizé community. The people attending Taizé that I have interviewed have all travelled to Taizé in France at some point, and from that I assume that they have at least made a conscious choice about attending this particular meeting. These people will be anonymous in this thesis, whereas the brothers will be referred to by name. I interpret the brothers' statements as being more representative for Taizé as a whole, and that is the reason why I have referred to them by name. The conversations with the brothers have not been very personal, but rather about the worldview and the ethos that they practise in Taizé, - giving me an indication of how visitors experience Taizé.

The first interview I did was at Lia Gård with a young adult born in 1986. This interview was in Norwegian as it is the first language for us both. He was at Lia for the Taizé-retreat and had previously been in France as a visitor. This person had grown up with Lia Gård, as a retreat-child during family retreats since the age of four to five. He had also worked at Lia, and had spent half a year living and working in the retreatcentre previously. His religious background is from a Pentacostal church, but in time he has

moved over to the state-church in Norway. The Pentacostal church and the state church in Norway are very different regarding liturgy, and they more or less represent two ends of the scale; the first quite spiritual and liberal; the latter conservative and formal. He had been introduced to Taizé through Lia, and has attended the Taizé-weekends there for some years. This person has an ecumenical background and would not be a stranger to ecumenism in practise, such as that seen in Taizé.

The second interview was during the same weekend at Lia. I interviewed a young Norwegian woman, born 1983. She told me that she found faith through Taizé, and has not grown up in a Christian environment. At the time of the interview she had been in Taizé in France three times, in addition to several weekends at Lia Gård. It is the community that is important to her. The music and the simplicity in the prayers are a drawing point, as she is not comfortable with “a hallelujah kind of worship” (Personal interview 2) and tongue speakers<sup>10</sup>. She has a musical background and plays the flute at times during Taizé prayers that she attends to in Norway. Both interviews at Lia were in Norwegian, and I have translated them myself.

The third informant was an ethnic white American, living in Ohio, born 1981. This person has grown up in a Christian home, going to church every week. He has attended a denominational church called Evangelical Friends, and was at the time of the interview working at First Friends as a youth pastor. He also talked about his Quaker background, with gatherings that are not unlike the prayers of Taizé. This similarity will be discussed at a later point. During the time of the interview he had been in Europe for three and a half weeks, attending the European meeting in Rotterdam<sup>11</sup> Prior to coming to the community. This interview was conducted in English.

The fourth and final interview was with a Russian adult, born 1969. He comes from a mixed background. Some of his family is Jewish, but he also has connections with both

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<sup>10</sup> Speaking in tongues, or glossolalia “is the fluid vocalizing of speech-like syllables, often as part of religious practise” (Wikipedia [online]). It is often practised in Free Evangelical Churches or Pentacostal churches in Norway.

<sup>11</sup> The European meeting in Rotterdam was arranged from 28.12.2010 to 01.01.2011.

the Catholic and the Orthodox church. This interview was in English, second language for both of us. He was brought to Taizé by a friend for his first visit when he was 30, and has since then been in touch with the community. Although he told me that somehow he always believed in God, he was not brought up in a Christian home, but started a spiritual search on his own initiative Prior to coming to Taizé for the first time.

One issue that I had with the interviews was that of language. I would very much have liked to interview either a German or a French person while I was in the community, as they are quite representative of the visitors. Many of them, although being able to speak and understand English fairly well, were not fluent to the point of being able to communicate their thoughts and feelings without constraint. As these interviews were quite personal I did not want language to be a hindrance to their accounts. Although my fourth interviewee spoke English very well, I doubt that the interview had the same fluency that it would have if we were speaking his native tongue, and thus the question; how would he have expressed himself were we speaking Russian? It would probably have been slightly different, with a fuller depth and vocabulary, and undoubtedly *better* than in a second language. This is slightly unfair to the informants, and may slant the question of them being able to express their experiences and emotions truthfully. I have been trying to avoid this issue, but while I was in France during my research I was the only Norwegian there, and it would really not be representative to interview only Americans, whom at that time were quite representative in the community. I decided to interview the Russian as he spoke English quite fluently and apparently had some experience using the language. Also, he represented a different background; that of both Orthodox and Catholic Christianity, and thus he is representative of the ecumenism of Taizé. These four informants are however not representative of the travellers in Taizé. A representative sample would involve Asians, Africans, Germans and French people, Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox Christians, along with non-believers. A master thesis with that many informants would not have the ability to search the depths of the individual experiences to the level I have attempted in this thesis. Thus the focus is slightly different than that of being representative for the whole community.

Another issue with the informants was that of age. Although a lot of the Taizé travellers are younger than these four, I would be wary of conducting an interview with a young teenager, mainly for ethical reasons. I believe it may be experienced as invasive for a young teenager to have an adult pry into their personal experiences. I am uncertain whether teenagers are in a position to balance their personal disclosure to a level that they are comfortable with later in life. Being an adult with an academic background, I would be in a greater position of power than just being the interviewer, which none the less is already a position of power. To limit the power inequality I have chosen adult subjects. The fact that the subjects were more or less my age made the communication easier, as I believe people of similar age or maturity share and understand each other more naturally. What astonished me during these interviews, was the different experiences these informants had. I felt myself getting frustrated as my theory of *similar* experiences failed. But reviewing the material, new categories emerged that could be blocked together; that of a profound feeling of inner peace and joy, how people interpreted those feelings as a divine communication, and the deep and lasting impact of living in community, albeit only for a limited amount of time.

#### **1.4.2 Fieldwork and participating observation**

The aim of the fieldwork has been to test the hypothesis I had about religious experiences with music as a catalyst. The fieldwork has consisted of two weekend retreats at Lia Gård, the first of those on the 5th-8th of March 2010. This weekend was my introduction to Taizé and the Taizé-music, where I did the first two interviews. In contrast to the quiet surroundings of Østerdalen is Oslo city, the next point of orientation for my research. During the weekend of the 17th-19th of September 2010, brothers of the Taizé community visited Oslo as part of their Pilgrimage of Trust on Earth. There were three brothers visiting, br. Stephen and br. Norbert, and also br. Alois, the Prior in the community. In contrast to Lia Gård the attenders were spread out sleeping in different accommodations within the city, some of the travellers being accommodated by complete strangers that welcomed them into their homes. This was my chance of seeing Taizé in

the centre of a metropole, and to study how a monastic community approaches a buzzing city.

To understand Taizé, and in an attempt to incorporate people's experience of it, a journey to Taizé in France was inevitable. A fieldtrip for research was arranged for January 2011, and at the point of travel I had no return-ticket booked. I had been repeatedly told that visitors were only welcomed for one week during the winter season, but I hoped to facilitate a longer stay. I ended up spending two full weeks in the monastery, -to stay longer would mean to join the volunteer workers, that stay for longer periods to help the brothers welcome travellers. Although this would certainly be very interesting, I feel it's a topic that would be getting away from what this thesis explores. I arrived in Taizé, Saône-et-Loire on the 9th and left it two weeks later on the 23rd of January 2011. During my time there, I was able to do two in-depth interviews with other travellers, and I also had conversations with some of the brothers that highlighted the values and visions of the community.

Br. Stephen and br. Norbert are the two brothers responsible for the Nordic countries<sup>12</sup>; of those two I have had most contact with br. Stephen. We have had several conversations, some of which I have recorded. Br. Jean-Marie, who is actually American, is the brother in charge of the liturgy. He kindly agreed to let me interview him during the fieldtrip to the community in January 2011. During my two weeks in Taizé, we had group conversations with the Prior on both Friday nights, just before the evening prayer. During these conversations the visitors had the opportunity to post questions to the Prior. These conversations have given me great insight as to the values and visions of Taizé. I recorded both of these conversations. For the quotations, I will refer to the brothers by their name only, and all these quotes are from personal interviews or group conversations that I have recorded during the two-week stay in Taizé communauté. If I refer to a general idea gathered through conversation, this will not be put in quotation-marks.

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<sup>12</sup> The brothers are delegated countries for which they are responsible, meaning that they are the ones travelling to these countries during larger prayers, weekends, or retreats. The same brothers meet with visitors from the countries for conversations during the week at Taizé in France.



I returned to Lia Gård on the 25-27 of March, for another weekend retreat. This had more of a clarifying function for the thesis. As written above, I struggled to find similarities in the accounts of the informants, as they all had very different experiences of Taizé. What I had expected was that they somehow would describe their experiences of singing, God and communication similarly. I investigated whether these informants could ascribe to a feeling of otherness<sup>13</sup>, or the sensation of flow; an activity in which the self is relatively superfluous (Nietz and Spickard 1990:20). But contrary to the feeling of flow, where people seem to forget that they exist, my informants told me that they were very conscious of themselves. When asked about the experience of the self in the prayer, of whether or not he was aware of himself, one of my informants told me: “Yeah, I am actually, very much so. Like I would change posture and things for different times. And I was aware not only of myself, but I was aware of [...] other people” (Personal interview 3). As such answers seemed to repeat themselves, I understood that I needed to change my initial theories. Looking at the data more closely, I discovered that new categories emerged from both the interviews and the fieldwork. According to Wadel, this is quite typical for qualitative research: “We could say that qualitative oriented research implies a roundel between theory/hypothesis, method and data *while* doing fieldwork” (Wadel 1991:129, my translation). Wadel lived within the environment that he studied for several years, implying that this roundel would be repeatedly changed and refined. I find this quite relevant to Taizé, as a Taizé experience is very much a “living-in” experience. The Oslo weekend felt qualitatively different from both the retreats and the fieldwork in France, probably due to the fact that I live in Oslo and stayed at home while participating, and thus I would miss out on the whole community-experience that Taizé offers. The final research trip to Lia thus helped me to clarify some of the new categories that I had seen emerge in the data.

The fieldwork that I have done has been in multiple locations; first in Østerdalen, secondly Oslo, then France, before returning to the point of origin; Østerdalen. Although

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<sup>13</sup> The feeling of otherness can also be called a transcendent experience, as in the Neitz and Spickard article (1990:17), where they state that such a feeling is fundamental to religion.

Taizé prayers have a given locality, namely the monastery, these prayers are also organised outwith their original location; the prayers are arranged on every continent and thus Taizé is global in nature. As such it is a complex object to study in a traditional ethnographic mode. Marcus writes about a multi-sited ethnography, as a “mode [that] defines for itself an object of study that cannot be accounted for ethnographically by remaining focused on a single site of intensive investigation” (1995:96). The languages and the countries of origin differ widely for the people that attend to Taizé prayers, and these people are also variously situated. To define Taizé as one culture is thus quite problematic, but again it is this multiculturalism that perhaps characterises Taizé, and furthermore that multiculturalism also attracts people to the community. Marcus writes that “Although multi-sited ethnography is an exercise in mapping terrain, its goal is not holistic representation, an ethnographic portrayal of the world system as a totality” (ibid.:99). As I have already mentioned, this study is not representative for the whole of Taizé, and that has never been my intention. However, the characteristic of multiculturalism, or universality as many informants expressed, turns out to be one of the main categories found in the data.

### **1.4.3 Analysis of Prayer and Community**

A Taizé arrangement consists of prayers and community life, and both have characteristics of ritual or ritual behaviour. To understand the totality of a Taizé experience I have analysed both, but the main focus is on the prayers and how these prayers link up to phenomenology. Taizé prayers are mostly sung liturgy and repeated songs. The songs are sung repeatedly with the intention of being meditative; “As the words are sung over many times, this reality gradually penetrates the whole being” (Taizé [online]). The sung music expresses much of the values in Taizé, and through studying the prayers we can see how the community expresses faith, identity, and worldview. This will be the main focus when it comes to the ritual analysis, namely how the prayer incorporates and expresses some of the categories that I have constructed around Taizé. First and foremost the impact of the prayers can be best interpreted through the personal experiences of them. That brings us right back to where we started: with the qualitative

interview. Only there can we see the full extent as to the actual effects of the ritual. And so we have come full circle in our chapter on method and analysis.

## 2. TAIZÉ AT A GLANCE

To bring the reader right into the Taizé experience, I have recounted some of my own impressions from my meetings with this community. I believe these may be quite representative for a Western Protestant coming into a Taizé prayer.

### **Cross Sections**

The first thing that struck me when I came into the chapel at Lia Gård, was the atmosphere. The candlelights and the orange signature veils create a warm room, - it has a homely and welcoming feeling to it. Then there is the silence. In a Taizé churchroom there is no talking, and as I approach the chapel the conversation quiets down and goes dead. The churchroom is beautiful; the stained glass paints the rays of light in different colours as they dance through the room. Outside the silence and the whiteness of winter lays everything dead, a contrast to the light and warmth of this room, only separated by a stone wall. It is not just a physical space, -as I settle in I feel I'm entering a different mindset, - a silent place. There is no-one in church facing me, no-one talks to me, I am alone in the midst of dozens of others, sitting on the floor. The bell chimes behind me, another reminder that we are entering a period of time set aside in daily life. And then the singing begins.

Oslo Cathedral, autumn. I live in Oslo, and as I was trying to fit the Taizé weekend in the schedule, I was arranging to see friends and preparing for work. I step into the registration centre outside the cathedral in a rush, on my way to meet someone else. I am met by a foreigner, who calmly wants to introduce me to the Taizé weekend, explaining prayers, living, food, etc. Feeling utterly misplaced, I excuse myself from these people that seem to have all the time in the world, pay my registration fee, and leave. I arrived late at the prayer in the evening, and found a place at the very back of the cathedral. Tourists drop by for a few minutes, poking their cameras in all directions, including my face, and talk loudly in languages I don't understand. I want to leave, but as people start leaving, I move up to the front and enter into the warm and light atmosphere of Taizé.

This time I'm sitting on a church bench, and in the front of the church, young people are moving forwards on their knees to pray around the cross, the wooden icon from Taizé. As I walk out later, Oslo by night strikes me. Oslo Cathedral is placed in the very centre of the city, which is usually quite lively on a Friday night. Coming out onto the main parade street, I can hear laughter, partying and fighting. As I look around I know that this area of the city is burdened with drug criminality and prostitution, - happening quite openly on the streets. The cathedral is placed in the middle of all this. The atmosphere inside appears to belong to a different world altogether.

Defining Taizé has been one of the challenges attached to this thesis. Br. Alois, the Prior, described it as an own order, a monastic community. At the same time, the order expands beyond its borders in Burgundy and in France. Brothers from the community travel to hold meetings throughout the world, but not for the purpose of gaining membership to their community. During one of the meetings with the Prior, he stated that "[...] we never will create an organised movement, movement of Taizé where people belong to, inscribe and becoming members, only our community, that's different". In this, Taizé cannot be compared to an organised church community, like for instance Baptists, the Pentacostal movement, Evangelical, or Anglican churches. The brothers purpose is that people who they are in touch with take their inspiration back to their homes, to their parishes and work from there. This is also part of what they call the Pilgrimage of Trust on Earth. Taizé very much practise what they label the universality of the church. Br. Alois spoke about that during the same meeting, telling the visitors about his experience as a young traveller to the community: "[...]for the first time, I really spoke with people from other continents [...]. So there were already, I felt already, universality of the church, yes. Church is not only my group, and what I know, yes, but church is this beautiful, beautiful communion, that unites us" (ibid.). Still many young people feel more attached to the community than a single, or even multiple journeys would suggest. Taizé prayers are held regularly in churches across Oslo, quite some distance from the origin of the community. These regular prayers differ slightly from the Taizé weekend in Oslo and the larger regional meetings; they do not include a visit from the community nor the original icons. Other countries throughout different continents also arrange regular Taizé prayers that do

not include the presence of the brothers. Verbum Forlag (2003, 2007) has issued Taizé songbooks with mainly Nordic songs to be used for prayers in Norway, where there are also written guidelines for common Taizé prayers. The community encourages this, with the request that the songs are used “with the same simplicity as in Taizé, so that groups and parishes can discover both the song itself and the prayer it expresses” (Taizé [online]). Thus the definition of Taizé is quite complex, as it is both the monastic community and a specific liturgy used worldwide. In this thesis, I will use the name Taizé with a general meaning, including the world-wide community and its pilgrims, and when I speak about the monastic community in Taizé I will make that clear with words such as in France; the community; in Burgundy, etc.

As Taizé prayers are held throughout different continents, their most common denominator is perhaps the songs. A Taizé meeting will include the Taizé songs as the connecting thread in the prayer, whichever language or country the prayer is arranged in. These songs are expressed prayers, and it is not unusual to repeat them ten times or even more within the liturgy. The intention behind this repetitiveness is that the songs are used for meditation. The silence is also a defining moment in the prayer, normally kept during the first half of the prayers or somewhere in the middle. Furthermore, to define what Taizé is, there is most definitely a need to talk about values and visions. The prayer reflects their visions and values in the songs, the silence, and even the decoration. The brothers have focused on the core values in the Gospels, and they try to live them out in daily life, which means that they come across with much integrity to the young visitors. Community-life is a drawing point for many of the young people that I met during my field research, - some of whom consider living in community, either a monastic community or otherwise.

### **A fundamental duality**

What I have discovered through the empiri is that Taizé consists of a fundamental duality; the individual and the community, inseparable and equally important. Taizé has developed an ability to allow people to come and experience the prayers on a personal

level, allowing individual freedom for interpretation, and at the same time they manage to incorporate that individual into a community of shared values and beliefs. The individual spiritual experiences that people have, alongside the experience of an international fellowship, or universality as many expressed, were the experiences that made the deepest impact on the people that I spoke with. In this lies the thrust of what Taizé really is.

## **2.1 The Taizé Prayers**

The Taizé-community has from the very beginning practised prayer three times a day; morning, midday and evening prayer. “From the very beginning, Roger prayed three times a day” (Santos 2008:59). Such prayer of the hours originate from a Catholic tradition, and is a common monastic practise. It bears reference to the canonical hours in Catholicism, or the liturgy of hours, and has a long history in Christianity dating back to Judaism and the Early Church. The prayers in the Taizé community are held at 08.15, 12.20 and 20.30, the final one normally lasting quite a bit longer than the other two, which are normally about 45 minutes to one hour. During Taizé retreats and larger city meetings prayers are also arranged three times a day, and for people not living in community that is somewhat unusual. The act of gathering in prayer that often is likely to add to the intensity of the experience of Taizé. One of my informants said that after the commitment of lifestyle, the prayer three times a day was one of the things that intrigued him the most about Taizé (Personal interview 3). Furthermore, as br. Jean-Marie sees it: “the prayer kind of inhabits the day [...] it orients the morning. You stop in the middle of the day for midday-prayer [...]. Then the evening, it’s the end of the day, it’s kind of one of the last things you do”. As the first informant had spent time living and working in Lia, he was used to a liturgy of hours from that kind of setting. “The liturgy of hours that they practise is good to enter into, to have...to live like that for a short or long period of time, where you set aside time no matter how hectic life is, you have this time three times a day, where it’s just you and God in the church” (Personal interview 1).

Apparently he does not perceive it as a daily chore, but something that structures and gives meaning to the day.

### 2.1.1 Structure of the prayer

“The major blocks of the prayer, the format of the prayer follow age old prayer of Christians, which derive from the prayer in the synagogue” (br. Jean-Marie). The structure of the Taizé prayer is very traditional, in that it is made up of psalms, reading from Scripture, and intercessions. “And so, if you were to look for example in The Book of Common Prayer, in The Anglican Church, it follows pretty much the same format, if you were to look at, and to see what priests do in the Catholic Church, when they pray their Breviary<sup>14</sup> [...]. So the Taizé prayer isn’t something that we’ve invented” (Jean-Marie). Below follows an example of how the evening prayer in Taizé was organised Friday 21.01.2011. The numbers of the songs are from *Songs from Taizé 2010-2011* (2010).

1.	Song: “Sviaty Boze”	Number 109
2.	Song: “Alleluia 18”	Number 75
3.	Scripture reading from St. John, first in French, then English	
4.	Sung response to Scripture, a <i>responsorium graduale</i>	From additional sheet
5.	Scripture reading in Korean (?), and German	
6.	Song: “Tui amoris ignem”	Number 14
7.	Silence, lasting 8.5 minutes	
8.	Song: “Kyrie 21”, sung as a <i>responsorium graduale</i>	Number 91

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<sup>14</sup> A breviary is a Catholic or Anglican liturgical book containing the public or canonical prayers, hymns, Psalms, and Scripture for everyday use.



9.	Song: Psalm	From additional sheet
10.	A spoken blessing, in English, Korean <sup>15</sup> , and French	
11.	Song: “Exaudi orationem meam”	Number 142
12.	Song: “Wait for the Lord”	Number 2

After the last song, the Prior gets up and many of the brothers leave the prayer. Some will remain however, and the singing tends to go on for quite a bit, it is thus not a fixed end to the liturgy. The congregation lingers on and continues singing songs from the songbook, accompanied by some of the brothers, a lead singer, soloists, and instrumentalists, and the rest of the brothers leave quietly one by one.

As the Taizé prayers are also held outwith the community, I thought it worthwhile to add another list of the structure of prayer as it was arranged at Lia Gård, on the 6th of March 2010, for the purpose of comparison. The numbers of the song in this selection is from the Nordic Taizé songbook.

1.	Song: “Nattens mørke”	Number 89
2.	Song: “Misericordias”, a <i>responsorium graduale</i> , alternating with verses from a Biblical psalm	Number 49
3.	Song: “I min Gud har jeg funnet styrke”	Number 53
4.	Scripture reading in Norwegian, English, and German	
5.	Song: “Augo er vende mot Jesus, vår Herre”	Number 3
6.	Silence, lasting 8.5 minutes	
7.	Song: “Kyrie 18”	Number 76
8.	Song: “Confitemini Domino”	
9.	Prayer (by one of the brothers)	
10.	Song: “I dine hender, Fader”, lighting of	Number 52

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<sup>15</sup> I must confess that I am actually not certain whether this is Korean or another Asian language. As there were several people from Korea present, I assume that it is Korean.

	candles	
11.	Song: “Du oppstod, Herre Krist”	Number 18

Four more songs are sung as people get up and quietly leave the prayer, similarly to the practise in the Taizé community.

These examples are quite typical for a Taizé prayer. Most noticeable by its absence is the complete lack of a sermon, or in fact, anything said addressed directly to the congregation. Now there are variations to the typical prayer that I will mention here, as they also are an important aspect of Taizé. Firstly the ”prayer around the cross”, normally arranged on a Friday night, is a special service. The cross is one of the best known icons from the community in Taizé, and during this prayer the icon will be laid down horizontally on bricks in the chapel for visitors to come and pray at. Some will just come and sit near it, others will kneel with their head on the cross, praying. On Saturday following the prayer around the cross, there will be an evening prayer with candles, symbolising, according to the winter 2010/2011 information sheet, the light of the Risen Christ. It can also symbolise a vigil, that there is light in the darkest of times. In the guidelines to preparing a time of prayer, the symbol of lighting candles is mentioned as a symbol that “[...] reminds us that even when the night is very dark, whether in our own life or in the life of humanity, Christ’s love is a fire that never goes out” (Taizé [online]). When I was in Taizé in France, the volunteers joked about how they celebrate Easter week every week, seeing the prayer around the cross on Friday as a remembrance of the death of Christ on Good Friday. Saturday then, is the dark day of waiting for the Lord’s resurrection, which is celebrated on Sunday morning with the Eucharist. I will discuss these actions further in chapter 3.

During the Taizé weekend in Oslo, there was to my surprise a sermon preached by br. Alois. Taizé prayers do not normally have a sermon, so this is a variant of that. As Oslo Cathedral is situated in the heart of the city, it would attract visitors that may not have come intentionally for the Taizé prayer, and thus the sermon also has a clarifying function.

### 2.1.2 Silence

As mentioned earlier, there is a period of silence at the Taizé prayers. In the community, there will be signs saying “silence” outside the chapel, and in other places visitors will be informed in some way. This is an unusual practise, as in many Christian churches the meetings also have a social function; people come together and socialise. But prayer in Taizé happens in solitude, even though it is in the midst of many others. Songbooks, Scripture readings, and Psalms are found to be collected just outside or inside the chapel, and from there on there is not meant to be any conversation. The silence in the liturgy lasts around ten minutes, and is not that common in Evangelical or Lutheran traditions. One of my informants labelled the silence the *crux* of the prayer, quite an interesting name to give it. I first heard the word *crux* during mountain climbing; it defines a specially difficult point on the route, the place where you get stuck for some time trying to find the right holds. It may thus be interpreted as a difficult point in the liturgy, or a difficult task. In the guidelines for preparing a Taizé prayer the community states that “The road to contemplation is not one of achieving inner silence at all costs by following some technique that creates a kind of emptiness within. If, instead, with a childlike trust we let Christ pray silently within us, then one day we shall discover that the depths of our being are inhabited by a Presence” (Taizé [online]). The last phrase here implies that this Presence dwells in the human, it does not enter through prayer or silence. That belief has some wide implications that I will discuss further below. The length of time that is spent in silence, means that the silence has an active role in the prayer and is not just an absence of sound, it has a purpose in itself. The purpose as I have understood it is that of communication with God, without words. The metaphor that I would use is that of a good friendship, one in which you could spend time in silence without it being awkward. The second informant said about the Taizé prayers that “I like the silence, to be silent with someone else. It is entirely different than being silent on your own, it is really pleasant” (Personal interview 2), which adds another dimension to it, that of a common practise, this is something that is done together with others. The interviewee from Russia said that they never used to have silences at his church, even though he had suggested it. “I always

deep thought that it is right when you pray to keep some silence[...]. I felt very good about it. I felt that how right it is, how this just like answering my wishes” (Personal interview 4). I will discuss more in depth what the informants experienced during the time of silence at a later point, for now it will suffice to state that silence has a major function in the structure of the prayer; one of allowing for a personal communication with God.

In the Taizé community, both visitors and brothers sit on the floor, or on little prayer stools that facilitate kneeling without having their legs ‘going to sleep’. There are some prayer stools to be found in the church, but not nearly enough for all the visitors that come. At Lia Gård, I also found that the chapel was void of chairs, and prayer stools were put out. There are also some chairs available for those who for any reason have trouble kneeling for a long period of time. Sitting on the floor has a very practical side; it allows for more people to cram together, and then it needs no arranging of rows and columns of thousands of chairs. It would be a fair bit of work to set up chairs for five to six thousand visitors, and it would take up more space. Sitting on the floor definitely bears a resemblance to monastic prayers as well, it gives a reference to ascetism and simplicity. In the community, with that many visitors, ‘walking-lanes’ have been marked up to prevent potential chaos.

### **2.1.3 Decoration and symbolism**

Before heading into the detail of Taizé’s decoration it is appropriate to discuss further the field of symbolic anthropology. Symbolic anthropology is a term given in retrospect to a number of diverse trends in the early Sixties (Ortner 1984:128). Ortner sums up quite effectively the theories in this field, and thus I will refer to her article here. Symbols are both vehicles for meaning, and they perform certain practical operations. Referring to Geertz; “culture is not something locked inside people’s heads, but rather is embodied in public symbols, symbols through which the members of a society communicate their worldview, value-orientations, ethos, and all the rest to one another, to future generations – and to anthropologist” (ibid:129). The practical operations within Taizé that are

performed through symbols will be discussed in the chapter on liminality. For this chapter, it will suffice to discuss how the worldview expressed in Taizé is communicated through physical symbols, such as icons and colours, and audible symbols, such as language and music. Symbols are vehicles of culture in the sense that they represent something other than the physical *thing*. From Turner's own fieldwork he states that "In an Ndembu ritual context, almost every article used, every gesture employed, every song or prayer, every unit of space and time, by convention stands for something other than itself" (Turner 1995:15). This statement sums up much of the character of symbolism, but it is still too shallow to incorporate the full meaning of symbolism. For Turner, symbols are operators in a social process, they perform an action as they produce social transformations, and the ritual mechanisms that he has identified, such as liminality and *communitas*, are essential to the analysis that I will make on Taizé. Within Geertzian framework, it is the actors' point of view that is the focus in studying culture. The logic of culture derives from the organisation of actions within institutional orders, how people interpret and act coherently according to these situations (Ortner 1984:130). As Taizé is an institutional order that is also global in character, the prayers of Taizé being organised on every continent, we will see that the interpretation of symbols is perhaps not so fixed, but rather it is dependent on an open interpretation, that is, the actor determines what interpretation is to be given to much of the symbols. This actor-centred perspective is fundamental to Geertz framework in symbolic anthropology, meaning that "culture is a product of acting social beings trying to make sense of the world in which they find themselves" (ibid.). That is also why I have given such emphasis to the personal experience of being in Taizé, and how the individuals themselves interpret songs and actions that take place within the prayer.

There is a need to clarify the relationship between anthropological symbolism and religious symbolism. Whereas what is written of above discusses the anthropological symbolism, religious symbolism is a field in and of itself. As many of the Taizé pilgrims interpret the ornamentation in the Church of Reconciliation quite liberally, there are certain items, such as icons, crosses, and stained glasses that have a specific symbolic frame of reference in Christianity. As Wikipedia states, icons "[are] a sign or likeness that

stands for an object by signifying or representing it either concretely or by analogy, as in semiotics” ([online]). I am not going to discuss this frame of reference in detail, but for the purpose of this thesis I will discuss some of the symbolism in the icon of resurrection, one of the icons that are well known within Taizé. Br. Stephen took the time to explain some of the details in this icon during the Taizé retreat at Lia in 2011, and what I am stating here refers to that group conversation.

The title “Icon of Resurrection” does not quite define what happens in this image, as the image really depicts what occurs in the time between the death and the resurrection of Christ. Christ is depicted in the centre of the icon wearing a white robe, and he appears to have something that looks like a wing on his back, which is not a wing, but a piece of his robe flapping as he is *going down*: he is descending into the land of the dead. The people standing around are also specific people; some of them kings of old (wearing crowns) that are dead, but most importantly there are Adam and Eve, in a blue and a red robe respectively at the front of the image. The tiny white thing in the hand of Christ is actually a scroll, referring to the good news of the Gospel. There are probably a number of other direct symbols in the image, but the most important is the meaning that Christ is bringing the news of the Gospel into the land of the dead. This frame of reference is common in religious symbolism, and icons have to be made in a specific way to be icons. Generally they are painted on a wood panel, two-dimensional, depicting Christ, Mother Mary, other saints or angels, - all of these with halos that have Greek symbols within, referring to their titles. Even the colours used in the image have specific interpretations to them.

A Taizé churchroom is further ornamented with a quite functional purpose, and not necessarily with a symbolic meaning. My own first impression was how the churchroom created a warm and welcoming atmosphere, and from my understanding of conversations with the brothers, that is intentional. Santos (2008) calls the front of the church the choir, - it is the focal point in the church, but there is no choir seated there. There is no pulpit, no worship leader or band, no priest or pastor, except during the Sunday Eucharist. The



The icon of resurrection as seen in the Church of Reconciliation.



The onion dome as seen on top of the Church of Resurrection. The fourth informant was from a Russian Orthodox tradition, and said he was particularly surprised to see that the brothers had paid that much attention to the Orthodox tradition, seeing how Taizé is situated in France.



A Taizé meal: Simplicity devoured.

The bowls are used for drinks, and the spoon is the only utensil needed for eating. A typical meal may consist of soup, pasta, bread, fruit and some cheese.

All Photos by Lillian Eide Sørensen.





Above: Brothers leaving the prayer. The icon of the cross, perhaps the best known icon from Taizé, is seen on the front, right-hand side.



Left: The focal point in the Church of Reconciliation; orange triangular banners and chimney blocks with candles.

Below: The dove-cross symbol that is particular for Taizé.





choir is rather filled with candlelights, and large orange banners with a triangular shape pointing towards the ceiling. I had noticed the prominence of the colour orange previously, during the Taizé retreat and the Oslo prayers. Br. Jean-Marie spoke about the significance of the colour, saying that it is warm, yet has light in it. “And it was also br. Rogers favourite colour”, he added. A Taizé churchroom is often decorated with warm colours such as red, orange, and yellow. These colours immediately create a homely and welcoming atmosphere, and they are chosen for that purpose. There is no intentional symbolism to the colours, even if many pilgrims seem to find a lot of spiritual *meaning* in them, such as the fire of the Holy Spirit. There is rather an intentional *function* for the presence of these colours. In the Church of Reconciliation the candles are arranged in hollow chimney blocks on the altar. These blocks look randomly stacked, and are quite a unique and simple decoration. Santos explains how they came about by accident: “In the mid 1970s an old altar was removed from the church, so the brothers stacked some chimney blocks left over from a building project in its place. Stacking the blocks in the shape of an altar and placing candles in them created a simple yet beautiful focal point” (Santos 2008:35).

During the fieldtrip I asked one of the volunteers in the community whether the banners symbolised anything, and he answered me then that they symbolise the fire of the Holy Spirit. I could see how the triangular shapes put together could look like a great orange fire, but asking around further, I found that there is no intentional symbolism to the banners. Santos gives an in-depth account of how the banners came about from the lack of a significant focal point in the centre of the choir. “In an attempt to fill this space in the mid 1980s, one of the brothers designed long strips of orange and red fabric that hung from the ceiling. These bands looked as if they were linking heaven and earth [...]” (Santos 2008: 36). The banners were later cut into triangles, simply to save the expenses that were connected to hanging them from plural points in European meetings (ibid: 37). And as Santos writes, “the sails evoked symbolic images of the flames of the Holy Spirit and boat sails” (ibid.).

What can be observed of importance here, is that a lot of the Taizé trademarks such as the colour orange, the triangular banners, and the hollow chimney blocks with candles have no intentional symbolism to them, but rather they have a practical and functional purpose. The symbolism is open for pilgrims and brothers to interpret to their own dispositions, so allowing for an individual experience.

Similarly to the icons, there is much symbolic meaning to the artwork made by named brothers that are found in the exposition adjacent to the Church of Reconciliation. Paintings and drawings are made of Christ, the life of Christ, Christian parables, and so on. The Taizé pendants are much loved by the pilgrims, especially the pendant that looks like an odd-shaped cross; it also bears the shape of the dove, and Santos simply names it the dove-cross pendant. The shape of the cross is the symbol of Christ, and the dove is a universal peace symbol. Other pendants with shapes such as birds, a fire in the dark, and calligraphy with different meanings, can also be found. The stained glass windows in The Church of Reconciliation show religious and symbolic images, such as Christ, the dove, Virgin Mary, and the Lamb. These clearly have symbolic intentions; it is rather the altar decorations, the focal point in the Taizé-prayer, that are open for individual interpretations.

On top of the Church of Reconciliation there is a very prominent symbol of their ecumenism; the onion-shaped domes that are traditional from Eastern Orthodox churches. The same volunteer that spoke about the (non-existing) symbolism of the orange banners, told me that these domes also represented the fire of the Holy Spirit<sup>16</sup>, the tongues of fire. According to Wikipedia the onion-shaped domes “are popularly believed to symbolise burning candles” (Wikipedia [online]), but I cannot find any basis for either of these assertions. However, the image of a Church with symbolism from Catholicism, Protestantism, and Eastern Orthodox Churches clearly paints out the *real* symbolism behind this: the union of all Christians. Just after the East German government announced that East Germans were permitted to enter West Berlin, the brothers expanded the Church

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<sup>16</sup> The fire of the Holy Spirit is accounted for in Acts 2:3.

of Reconciliation and erected several onion-shaped domes on the roof to welcome the first-time Eastern Europeans to the community (Santos 2008:74).

#### **2.1.4 Taizé music**

Taizé prayers involve a lot of singing. It is mainly a sung liturgy; a prayer will normally start with a song and the singing continues at the end of the prayer even after the brothers have left the church. In Taizé communauté, almost all liturgy is sung, in addition to the repetitive Taizé songs for which the community is well known. With sung liturgy, I refer to the Eucharist, Our Father, and responsive verses such as *Kyrie*<sup>17</sup> and *Alleluia*, responses to prayers and Scripture. The music of Taizé is a drawing point for many. Of the four people I interviewed in-depth, only one of them claimed to have no knowledge of music, and the three others had different ranges of musical abilities. There is an aspect of simplicity and sharing to be found in Taizé liturgy. What many people notice at first is how easy one can learn the songs used in the prayers. Normally there are songbooks to be found just inside the chapel used for prayers. In the Taizé community, a red led-light will announce the number of the song to be sung, or for other places it may be written on a board. The Taizé songs are generally one to four verses long, here meaning the poetic definition of verse, where a verse represents one line in the stanza (which is what most people mean when they talk about verses). All songs in the songbooks are written with notes. The songbooks are printed with choral arrangements for soprano, alto, tenor, and base, whereas the canons will only be written with the melody that nevertheless will harmonise when sung as a canon. People from a musical background can read the notes and join in the harmonies, while people from non-musical backgrounds can simply listen and learn as the songs are repeated multiple times. The amount of repetitions vary from place to place, and according to how long the song itself is, and also according to when they are sung in the prayer. During the late hours of evening prayer, when people linger, the songs may be repeated more times than at other prayer times, or at the beginning of a

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<sup>17</sup> The sung prayer “*Kyrie eleison*” is from Greek and translates “Lord, have mercy”, or as in Taizé songbooks: “Lord, have compassion”. In Taizé it is also sung in Russian: “*Gospodi pomilui*” (*Songs from Taizé*, 2010).

prayer, when ten repetitions is normal. The songs are functional for the purpose that people visiting a prayer for the first time can join in the singing quite easily. One or two repetitions is enough for most people to sing along with the melody, and within a weekend or a week they will have learned the songs that have been used at the attended prayers. At all the Taizé arrangements that I have attended, there has been an optional song practice, where people can learn and practise the harmonies. In Taizé communauté it is scheduled for two o'clock every day; outwith it is often arranged as a workshop. The songs practised will be the ones that are currently at use in the prayers.

**55** Da pacem cordium (canon) \* *Da pacem Domine*

“Da pacem cordium” (*Songs from Taizé*, 2010:55). Composed by J. Berthier. © Ateliers et Presses de Taizé, 71250 Taizé, France. Printed with permission.

Harmonically it is slightly different as long vowels (“a” in *pacem*) are sung superimposed on a rhythmic ostinato.

One particular aspect of the Taizé songs is the repetitiveness. Many of my informants spoke of the songs as an opportunity to meditate through music, and that the repeated singing functioned more as a mantra; something repeated as a prayer, so many times that the words sink into your being. From the community’s website such a purpose is explicit: “Short songs, repeated again and again, give it a meditative character. Using just a few words they express a basic reality of faith, quickly grasped by the mind. As the words are sung over many times, this reality gradually penetrates the whole being” (Taizé 2004 [online]). Through the interviews, it became clear that the interviewees did experience that.

“I have the experience of singing a phrase, and not thinking, I just sing, kind of, I know the song, there it is, and then I sing, and we sing, over and over again. And suddenly the lyrics strike me, they really hit me. Suddenly I understand it, even if I have said that phrase many, many times. So there is something to what they say, that you sing it so many times that it becomes a part of you. And then suddenly you understand what it really is about” (Personal interview 2).

This interviewee told me that she had that feeling of the lyrics “breaking through” with one particular song; “Herren er kjærleik” (*Sanger fra Taizé*, 2003:48), a song about the perfect love of Christ, a love that is without fear<sup>18</sup>. “Understanding that, I understand better who God is through thinking love without fear” (Personal interview 2), she continued.

The repetitions serves a particular purpose at the prayers. The first informant told me how he used to count them initially, but after attending the prayers for some time, the whole aspect of time seemed to fade away, and the songs contributed to the feeling of being in the moment. “What I think is special about the Taizé songs, that I noticed particularly in Taizé [France], was an inner peace. That now I’m just here, and nothing else...I don’t care about anything else, right now. Now it’s just me and God here, well, and I suppose everyone else around, but we are there, just with God” (Personal interview 1). The third informant also expressed that he loved the repetitions, and that they were helpful “because I think it grounds it into your spirit and into your heart. [...] It’s extremely helpful to take something, and to do it over and over and over until it becomes part of you” (Personal interview 3). The repetitions thus serve the purpose of repeated practice for these informants.

The Taizé songs are short and simple, but they are not stripped of their beauty. Many of the songs are sung as an *ostinato chorale*, with a solovoice superimposed. So even though these solos are elaborate, visitors can still participate in their beauty, singing the chorus. The songs are made so that everyone can participate in the prayer. That is one of the sharing aspects of Taizé that I will discuss in detail below.

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<sup>18</sup> “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love” (1.John 4:18).

## Laudate omnes gentes

The musical score is written for a solo voice and a four-part harmony. The melody is in the treble clef, and the accompaniment is in the bass clef. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are: Lau - da - te om - nes gen - tes, lau - da - te Do - mi - num. Lau - da - te om - nes gen - tes, lau - da - te Do - mi - num. Lau -

(Louez le Seigneur, tous les peuples. / Lodate il Signore tutte le genti. /  
Chwalcie Pana, wszystkie narody. / Прославляйте все народы Господа. *Ps 117*)

“Laudate omnes gentes” (*Songs from Taizé*, 2010:23) Composed by J. Berthier. ©  
Ateliers et Presses de Taizé, 71250 Taizé, France. Printed with permission.

“Laudate omnes gentes” is perhaps the best known song from Taizé.

In the liturgy, the *Alleluias* and the *Kyries* are sung as *responsorium graduales*, and the congregation will hum the chords in the background as a soloist sings the prayer. Solos and prayers are sung by one of the brothers in the community, or by one of the members of the worship group in prayers outwith. These solos are normally taken from Scripture, and prayers may also simply be read and not sung. During Lent<sup>19</sup>, a *Misericordia* will be sung instead of an *Alleluia*.

<sup>19</sup> Lent is the period in the liturgical year leading up to Easter, a period of fasting and repentance.



“Alleluia 11” (*Songs from Taizé* 2010:72). Composed by J. Berthier. © Ateliers et Presses de Taizé, 71250 Taizé, France. Printed with permission.

The grace notes indicate the soloists’ part. As the soloist sings his part, the choir will hum the Ab in the background, changing to Eb as the soloist ends his solo with the *Alleluia* indicated in the notes in the last bar. This sequence will be repeated several times. The *Alleluia* will then end on the penultimate bar.

In the Taizé community, seeing how the music is vocal music, there is not a vast instrumental accompaniment to the songs. Music is kept simple. When I was there, either an organ, or an electric keyboard sounding like a guitar, was used. Both these instruments were very non-invasive so that the vocal harmonies were the audible focal point. For the Taizé prayers in the Nordic countries, Ulla Käll is a main driving force. The Swedish musician plays classical guitar and arranges for other instruments to accompany, such as flutes, oboes, or string instruments. Instrumental solos are played superimposed on the ostinato. A striking feature of the Taizé music is the multitude of languages they are sung in. The songs will have several interpretations written out in the songbooks, so that languages can be alternated. It is common that different languages are sung during the same prayer.

The French composer Jacques Berthier has written a great amount of the music used in Taizé, and it is his songs that are the best known songs from Taizé. These songs and the liturgy were composed upon request from the brothers as they wanted to use a liturgy which more people could participate in. The prayers in the Seventies were thus changed to accommodate for a growing mass of pilgrims, and the brothers intentionally strove for these prayers to become more simple for the purpose of sharing. Both br. Jean-Marie and

br. Alois spoke of the process behind this change, and br. Jean-Marie offers a well-rounded explication as to how they came to have the form that they do.

“[...] what we’ve done[...] was that we started asking; [...]What’s really important in the prayer, and what helps people pray deeply, and enter into prayer, and to find entry, entrance, right? To find the door. If you have something which is too, if you give people a book, or people have several books when they come into the church, and they have to find out where they’re gonna be [...]prayer will be something so complicated that I think most people, 99 out of a 100 people, will just find it, it’s too complicated for me [...]. So, I guess what we want to do, is to try to make the prayer as accessible [...] to people as possible, which doesn’t mean simplifying it to the extreme, but which means simplifying it. So the songs that we use, that, as we call them the Taizé-songs, that grew out of that desire to do something which was simple for people, so that they could, someone, who’s coming for just one prayer, could start singing and praying. They came from Norway, or they came from the US, or from France, or from Italy, or from wherever, they could also, they could find some things that they’d understand” (Jean-Marie).

As I wrote about intentions at the beginning of this thesis, I think it is quite important to investigate the background for the creation of the music, as music is a drawing point for many visitors. What becomes clear in the quote above is that these songs were created with a specific purpose; to do something which was simple in order for people to be able to participate. Furthermore, there is an explicit intention to help people enter into prayer, and to pray deeply. Br. Alois also spoke about the earlier prayers, and apparently these prayers were much more elaborate, with long, monastics psalms, before the pilgrims started coming in greater numbers.

“I came first to visit, in 70, 1970, I don’t remember very well, these years. And then it started to change a little bit in 74, 75, when br. Roger said, ‘oh, we have to change the prayers’, because before it was much more monastic prayer, with long psalms. And in French, and I didn’t speak a word of french. [...] Beautiful, but difficult melodies, and complicated. You could not join really when you came here for a week, you could not join. Then br. Roger said, ‘oh we have to change the prayers, so that everybody can participate’. That’s why the different languages, the different songs, the [repetetiveness]” (Br. Alois).

The use of multiple languages is another aspect of the prayer which comes out of a desire to share with the visitors. This will be arranged according to the nations that the brothers expect will be present at the prayers. As part of this principle of sharing, the brothers have incorporated songs from Orthodox traditions, some of these from a Russian Orthodox tradition. These are quite different from the typical Taizé songs both melodically and harmonically.



**109 Sviaty Bože**

Свя-тый Бо - же, — свя-тый креп - кий, — свя-тый бес-смерт-ный по - ми - луй нас.  
 Svia - ty Bo - že, — svia - ty krier - ki, — svia - ty biez-smiert - ny po - mi - lui nas. (3 ×)

Слава Отцу и Сыну и Святому Духу и ныне и присно и во веки веков. А-минь. Свя-тый бес-смерт-ный по -  
 Slava Otsu i Synu i Sviatomu Duhu i nynie i prisno i vo vieki vekov. A - min. Svia - ty biez-smiert - ny po -

ми - луй нас. Свя-тый Бо - же, — свя-тый креп кий, — свя-тый бес-смерт-ный по - ми - луй нас.  
 mi - lui nas. Svia - ty Bo - že, — svia - ty krier - ki, — svia - ty biez-smiert - ny po - mi - lui nas.

(Dieu saint, saint et fort, saint et immortel, aie compassion de nous. Gloire au Père et au Fils et au Saint Esprit maintenant, toujours et dans les siècles des siècles. / Holy God, holy and strong, holy and immortal, have mercy on us. Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever.)

“Sviaty Boze” (*Songs from Taizé*, 2010:109). Orthodox tradition, unknown composer.  
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Sung as written with no further repetitions. The open octaves give a particular impressive impact when sung by that many male voices.

The historical sources of the Taizé music will not be discussed here, the focus is rather how the prayers function and how people respond to them. What was discovered was how feeling connected with a multicultural community invoked an experience of universality. The individuals were through the prayers connected with something larger than the self, a community in the here and now that represents the universality of the Church on a larger scale. This will be discussed further in chapter 3.

## **2.2 The Taizé community**

### **The grounds and people of Taizé communauté**

Most people visiting the community in Taizé arrive by bus, and the local bus stops at the top of a hill where the community is located. Visitors are normally welcomed at a yellow house called La Morada, which also functions as a portal to the brothers of the community, who live separately. At La Morada visitors are welcomed and delegated a room within the dormitories (unless camping), they are given a short introduction to life at Taizé, the schedule of the day(s), questions are being answered, and the stay is paid for. La Morada can be compared to a reception desk, where you are greeted and your requests are being forwarded to the right people. It is also a place for dialogue with the brothers, and has several small rooms made for this purpose. During my stay I found it also had a social function, with international newspapers and the possibility to chat with one or two of the volunteers or brothers. Still, it is clearly understood that this place is not a café or somewhere to hang out in leisure time.

The main area consists of the Bell Tower, The Church of Reconciliation, an eating hall, or larger outdoors eating areas (depending on the season), and toilets. As the summer season is busier, and warmer, food is served and people eat outdoors sitting under a large tent. An indoor hall is used for this purpose during winter. The Bell Tower is placed at the entrance of Taizé, and marks the rhythm of the day, which is the prayers. It has a wake-up call at 07.45, and rings for about 8 to 10 minutes before morning, afternoon, and evening prayer. The Church of Reconciliation was built in 1962 and is located in the middle of the settlement. This is the largest building in the community, and it grows with the visitors. The church hall is built so that it can be extended as more visitors arrive, a functional feat that shows the brothers' adaptability.

Another building that deserves mention is the multi-purpose El Abioth, placed in the area of the dormitories. Where La Morada is the portal to the brothers, El Abioth is the portal to the sisters that stay on the grounds. It has conversation rooms, much like La Morada,

but it also sleeps pilgrims in silence, couples, elderly, - anyone who has specific needs for a single room with bathrooms nearby. During winter it also functions as the main kitchen.

In addition to the main area, the grounds consist of several rows of dormitories, and it includes fields for camping and caravans, mostly used in summer. There are bathrooms and showers located next to the dormitories, and a small café, the Oyak, where snacks and toiletries can be purchased. The brothers live in a separate area, separate from both visitors and permanent volunteers.

The prayers three times a day mark the rhythm of the day, and is attended to by brothers, volunteers, and visitors. It is expected that visitors partake in all aspects of the programme that is set up, which includes the prayers, meals, Bible introductions, and work.

The brothers' only income is from their creative work, mainly pottery, but it also includes jewellery and other artefacts, which can be seen and bought in the exposition, adjacent to the Church of Reconciliation. This also functions as a bookstore, selling books of particular interest to Taizé.

The brotherhood of Taizé is a multicultural one; among the hundred brothers there are about thirty different nationalities. The community attracts people from all over the world. From the early 1960's young pilgrims have been coming in larger numbers to the community to pray with the brothers. Today, Taizé welcomes about 100 000 travellers a year. During my first week of fieldwork in Taizé, I counted 21 different nationalities amongst the visitors that I spoke with; from Russia; Finland; Germany; France; Lithuania; Switzerland; Estonia; Slovenia; Poland; Spain; Italy; Portugal; Peru; Brazil; US; China (Hong Kong); Korea; Phillippines; Indonesia; Australia; and then myself as the only Norwegian.

In addition to the brothers there are other people staying long-term in the community. The brothers receive support from three communities of sisters that come and help out for

some time in the monastery. Furthermore, there are young volunteers that help out. The volunteers now make up quite a large part of the picture of Taizé, as they are the ones responsible for many of the practical jobs in welcoming the visitors, arranging the church for prayer, and daily chores. The volunteers stay and live in the grounds for different lengths of time. This is the option for those who want to stay any longer than two weeks. The volunteers have separate houses, they do not dwell with the visitors, but stay in houses divided by gender. Amongst the young males there is a further separation between short-term and long-term volunteers. Some of the long-term volunteers are future brothers of the community, and stay there as they work through their decision for a life commitment.

Taizé does welcome about five to six thousand pilgrims at peak periods during the year, such as Easter and summer.

### **2.2.1 Historical background**

Santos (2008) has written a condensed historical overview of the history of Taizé, including br. Rogers' background and the early years of the brotherhood. I refer to Santos for the historical facts for this entire subchapter, as I will draw upon only the relevant bits of information for this thesis<sup>20</sup>. Beginning with the founder of the community, br. Roger was born to a French mother and a Swiss father, who were both Protestants. Both parents and grandmother allegedly practised their religion quite open-mindedly; they would pray in Catholic churches and receive the Eucharist. This was fairly unusual for Protestants in pre-World War Europe. Also, while attending secondary school, br. Roger was sent to live with a poor Roman Catholic widow in another village. Br. Roger studied theology for four years at the Universities of Lausanne and Strasbourg, and although the early years were filled with doubts and insecurities, he came through as a dedicated leader of the Student Christian Association during the last year. It was within this group that a

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<sup>20</sup> For further historical background look to José Luis Gonzales-Balado 1981, *The Story of Taizé*, Rex Brico 1978, *Taizé: Brother Roger and His Community*, and Kathryn Spink 1986, *A Universal Heart: The Life and Vision of Brother Roger of Taizé*.

small community formed that arranged retreats every other month. “These retreats were characterized by an authentic search for God through prayer, silence, meditation and confession” (pg. 57). As the war began, br. Roger looked for a place to settle, where he could live out his ideas of community. The defeat of France evoked powerful sympathy, and the brother wished to settle there to assist those who needed it most. Eventually, he came to Taizé in 1940 and chose to stay as he was requested to remain in the isolated village.

For the first two years the brother sheltered Jewish refugees in his home, even though the authorities were suspicious of his activities. It was during a trip to Switzerland, that the Gestapo raided the house in search for refugees. As the Gestapo were waiting to arrest Roger upon his arrival in Taizé, he was unable to return to France. Br. Roger stayed in Geneva and finished his academic work about monastic life. It was through this that Roger came into contact with the first people that would form the brotherhood of Taizé. In 1944, as France was liberated from German control, the first four brothers were able to move to Taizé to stay. Strong anti-German sentiments grew in the area, and in the midst of that, the brothers started ministering to German prisoners of war. The brothers visited them and were also able to invite them “as guests to the house for dinner” (pg 61). This was fairly unpopular in the local area, but the brothers continued with their activities as they believed and worked for reconciliation. Reconciliation lies at the heart of Taizé, and from the very beginning the community has practised this in several ways. As the group of brothers grew and was established as a Protestant monastic order, they were also characterized by ecumenism. They “were determined to seek reconciliation in the estranged relationship between Roman Catholics and Protestants” (pg 63), - and eventually also with Orthodox Christians. In 1958 br. Roger was granted yearly audiences with the Pope to discuss ecumenism in the Catholic Church, and in the early Sixties the number of visitors to the community began to really grow, now coming from both Protestant and Catholic backgrounds. A new church was built within the monastery, “dedicated as a place for reconciliation and peace on earth” (pg. 67); the Church of Reconciliation. As young people continued to flock to Taizé, “Brother Roger decided that an intentional effort to speak into the lives of these youth must become a priority” (pg.

69). It was first in September 1966 that the community held their first *intentional* youth gathering. The following years a series of summer meetings were held, and in 1970, br. Roger announced that a Council of Youth was going to be held. This was a response to the young people's wish to take home what they had experienced within Taizé, and over the next years, "young people met to discuss and pray about how to usher reconciliation into the world" (pg.70). It was in 1974 that br. Roger "invited the young people to begin to bring reconciliation across the globe" (pg.71), and eventually, the "Pilgrimage of Trust" was born through this initiative. Until the late 1980s, Eastern Europeans and Russians were mostly prohibited from travelling to Taizé, but as the Berlin Wall fell, Orthodox Christians were able to join in the prayers, gathering the three traditions of Christianity to prayer in the Church of Reconciliation.

## **2.3 Shared values and visions**

The shared values and visions are what identify Taizé more than anything, and many of the people visiting the community or participating in prayers do share them. It has taken some time to identify these values as they are not very often explicit, but rather they pervade all the things that Taizé does. Some of the background for this chapter is found in *The Sources of Taizé*, written by br. Roger (2000). This thin, little book is addressed directly to the reader, which makes it come across as a personal invitation from the author. As sermons are rarely held in a Taizé-setting, the book gives a good insight as to much of the values of Taizé, especially when it comes to how these values are ushered practically within Taizé. Another source for these values are the Bible introductions within Taizé. The Bible introductions are usually held by a brother after morning prayer and breakfast. During the Bible introduction, the brother will speak to the visitors, read from Scripture and perhaps do some practical training. After the brothers' talk, the visitors will normally be divided into groups of age and nationality for sharing groups. A piece of paper with some topics and questions will be handed out, and the brother then leaves as the groups share and discuss these (or any other topics they may digress onto).

The dynamics of the sharing groups and the Bible introductions are an important forum for forwarding Taizé values and visions. The rather curious fact is that the brother leaves as the discussion starts, and thus he does not participate in the outcome of the discussion, and he does not answer the questions himself, or on behalf of the community. Another forum for understanding the values of Taizé is their “Letters from Taizé”, issued every year. These letters are written by the Prior. I have only taken into account the letters from 2011 as that has been the most relevant. Otherwise these values have emerged from group conversations and interviews with the brothers.

### **2.3.1 Simplicity and sharing**

I have personally felt out of place many times within Taizé, like I come from a different world and I don't understand what it is they are doing. Life in Taizé differs quite a bit from the high-speed city life that many Westerners are accustomed to. Santos' (2008:32) account of the meal distribution in Taizé made me laugh, as it reflected much of my own experience with the first meal in the Taizé community. I had arrived in the evening to the community after spending a night in a Paris hotel, and most of the day travelling or waiting in stations. It was not my first meeting with Taizé, and from my experience during the Oslo prayers, I expected food to be simple and sparse. In Oslo, this was no problem, - I could buy my own food or eat at home, which I did do after the Taizé-snack. As most people visiting were accommodated in homes, I believe the food distribution team took this into account. In France, however, the nearest town is a 45 minute walk away, or a 10 minute busride on the rare local transportation. The visitors are meant to be able to have what they need in the community. I arrived, quite typically, in the evening right before dinner, was welcomed and allocated a dormitory that I shared with two to three other visitors. At dinner we all gathered in Hall 10, the meal hall during winter, introduced ourselves as the new visitors to the group, were given information, and sung a short-version (two repetitions) of one the Taizé songs. Joining the line for food distribution, I was given a tray, a plate, a bowl and a spoon. After having been served the meal, I went to one of the volunteers and asked where I could find a fork. He shrugged his shoulders. “There is no fork”, I was told. “A knife? No, no knife either.” I still didn't

get the point and asked for a glass. “We don’t have glasses. You can drink from your soup bowl (which was full of soup). Oh here, I’ll get you a clean one.” I must have looked pretty astonished then, because he followed up explaining: “It’s simplicity. It’s Taizé”. Having finally understood the point, the diva found a seat and ate her meal utterly embarrassed.

Simplicity is a common practise found in many aspects of life at Taizé. It is an old monastic practise, and it is not always uttered as directly as it was to me, but rather found as a part of daily life, like for instance the meals. Simplicity is mentioned in the life-commitment vows that brothers take to join the community: “Stay simple and full of joy [...]” (br. Roger 2000:72). Simplicity comes as part of community life, the life of common goods, which means not only sharing possessions, but also an attitude of openness towards others. The life of common goods is one out of three traditional monastic vows that the brothers undertook from the beginning in 1949 (Santos 2008:62). The vows as they exist today are found explicitly in *The Sources of Taizé*, and this one says: “Will you, renouncing all ownership, live with your brothers not only in community of material goods but also in community of spiritual goods, in utter openness of heart?” (br. Roger 2000: 73-74). It did take me some time to catch the true meaning of simplicity during my visit to the community. Simplicity and even poverty are quite common values in monastic orders, and the brothers of Taizé give up any property or ownership as they enter the brotherhood. But why? Asceticism is definitely part of the reason. Many visitors and brothers find that the life in simplicity brings about more joy, quite in touch with “simple and full of joy”, as written above. But furthermore, I found that simplicity in Taizé is in order to share. Simplicity and sharing go hand in hand in this community, they are linked like two sides of a coin.

During the interview with br. Jean-Marie, I pried further into the questions and practises around simplicity in Taizé. Br. Jean-Marie confirmed what I initially thought, that simplicity “is not an ideology, it’s not something we try to apply across the board, and we say; well, this has to be simpler”. It is not simplicity in itself as a rule that is applied, but simplicity is functional for many aspects. We spoke about the meal distributions, and br.



Jean-Marie explained that it is simple also in order to make it easier; the fewer utensils, the less dishes to do afterwards, and then the focus is not so much on what we do, but rather that we do it together. “Simplicity has a way of inviting people, at least, allowing people to be a little closer to one another”, he said.

One of the aspects of Taizé is the internationality, and people visit from every continent. The challenge in this is to make a common ground for everybody, regardless of background, culture, and wealth. Simplicity in the meals has a way of “putting people on the same footing, it’s an equalizer” (Jean-Marie). Visitors that come may be used to knife and fork (as in Europe), sticks, or even no utensils at all, but when everybody eats the same meal, with only the necessary utensils, the class-distinctions that are so evident in our multicultural world are much limited.

It is not just the utensils, but also the food itself is simple in Taizé. There is not much option as to what to eat. When I was there in winter, I was told that food was much better in winter than in the summer with thousands of visitors. Visitors are not starved in Taizé, and there is enough food for people to get properly full after the meal. The nutritional value, however, is quite poor. Santos (2008:33) explains “...it’s not meant to sustain you for your lifetime. It’s not even meant to sustain you for several weeks at a time. It’s designed to feed six thousand people in about an hour”. The volunteers and the brothers eat separately, and for people staying long-term the food is of better quality. Simplicity in meals is not a forced rule; people are allowed to bring their own food as well. But as Santos (2008:33) explains, eating simply is part of the community-life that many people wish to participate fully in.

The brothers have at some point chosen to share their prayers with the visitors. As intention is a focal point in this thesis, I thought it worthwhile to question why they wish to share it, and with that many different nationalities. During one of the group conversations I asked the Prior why they welcome so many young people. “Why do we welcome so many young people? Because you come!”. The simple answer was met by a roar of laughter. But as we saw in the historical background, people really started coming

without an invitation. During the conversations with br. Stephen, I asked further whether the community aimed to reach out to young people. He said the meetings in Taizé actually came about by accident, explaining the background from the student riots in Paris.

“And then this thing happened, which nobody quite understood, and which began really with the student riots in Paris [...]. There was a buzz around that Taizé was a good place to hang out, and some of these young people, maybe mostly students, came to Taizé and would hang out. And it was a quite difficult situation for the brothers, because...eh, we were trying to be a monastic community, and they were hanging about with guitars and long hair, and revolutionary ideas. And the two didn't exactly go together. And they weren't here to pray really, they were here to meet each other, and maybe meet the brothers. Some of the brothers were very upset, and said we have to escape from this mess. It wasn't very clear how to escape from this mess, because like I said, it was like a buzz, I mean nobody organised it or anything. And one of the old, wise brothers said; if the young people are coming here, it must be God who is sending them. And if God is sending them, then we should welcome them[...]. So that's really how the meetings started” (br. Stephen).

Apparently it was quite difficult to begin with, as the brothers would invite the young people to the prayers, but they could not force them. But eventually the brothers got a hold of the situation by inviting the young people to stay if they participated in the daily chores. What I understand is that the meetings of Taizé came about as the brothers made a choice about sharing their prayers, their life, and also the grounds that they live in.

“And I think if Taizé gives anything, it's an actual space, it's a geographical space, where hopefully there is a freedom, that people can open up and share about the questions which are important to them” (br. Stephen).

Br. Roger writes in *The Sources of Taizé*: “You want to follow Christ, and not look back: remember that, as you walk in his footsteps, you will be irresistibly drawn to share, and to a great simplicity of life” (2000:17-18). The appeal to sharing and simplicity has a theological background from the first church of the apostles. “All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts” (Acts 2:44-46). In both these passages, simplicity and sharing seem to be two aspects of the same thing. Simplicity is in order to share, and not just for the sake of ascetism. It puts people on equal ground in the community.

There are other aspects to simplicity and sharing, that make up the values and visions of Taizé. Sharing is also linked to the Biblical virtue compassion, where it is not just sharing with those who belong to the same economic and material level as oneself, but also sharing with those who have less, or sharing with the needy. Again, such values are interlinked, as compassion and sharing are also related to love. The brothers have dedicated themselves not just for sharing their life with those on the same economic level, but to share also with the needy, and to live in the world with compassion for the poor. Br. Alois, rather than giving a speech upon how to practise compassion, shared some of his experiences from Haiti, with wounded and orphaned children.

“Compassion...oh, I saw such a beautiful example of compassion, in Haiti. Because this really devastated country, completely, completely destroyed. So we went on Sunday morning, we went to the Sisters of Mother Theresa, and they have 400 children there, and they were...it was beautiful. They were beautifully dressed, really Sunday, and they had their hairs very much...It takes hours, I think, to prepare this. Very small children, yes, but, phew, I was so struck that the sisters pay attention to that. I mean [...] come to church on Sunday, but no, Sunday is special. And these children they have the right for something beautiful also. And they have also the right to know that Sunday is a special day. And I felt this beautiful example of compassion. I mean, you could make it much more simple, and say, oh it's children, and you care for them and that, but to make an effort that they experience a beauty, yes. I was very much touched.” (br. Alois).

What appears to have struck the Prior here, is that these children did not just have their basic needs fulfilled, but that there was a further intentional effort to give them something *more* than that, to let them experience a special day, to let them experience beauty.

A further aspect to that of sharing is joy, again interlinked with compassion. As br. Roger writes: “Sharing your possessions leads you to simplify your life and to open your home [...]. Having many possessions is a hindrance rather than a help to a wider communion. At mealtime, the spirit of festival flourishes in simplicity” (2000:20). The “Letter from Chile” (2011) begins with a section on joy, where br. Alois writes about “those who suffer poverty and deprivation”, and that even those are capable of a “spontaneous joy in living”. A further interpretation of this is that it is not material wealth that brings about joy. In Taizé teachings, joy comes about from sharing, and it is also a conscious choice. The letter states that “This joy does not depend on passing circumstances; it comes from

trust in God” (br. Alois, 2011). Joy is here made intrinsic, - it does not come about from external circumstances, but it is something that dwells in the person as a part of faith. The Prior quotes the Bible, writing: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice [...] The Lord is near” (Philippians 4:4-5). This is an invitation to find joy in the faith in a divine presence. And furthermore, “Tasting God’s joy, however fleetingly, turns us into women and men of communion. Individualism as a road to happiness is an illusion” (br. Alois 2011). The Prior links this intrinsic joy from faith to a life of community, writing that “joy is inseparable from a concern for other human beings [...]. The road to happiness, in the steps of Jesus, lies in the gift of ourselves, day by day. Through the lives we live, in great simplicity, we can express God’s love” (ibid.). The fundamental duality of Taizé is that of the individual and the community, and it comes clear in that it is the individual experience of God that leads to a successful life in community. What is seen here links up to the Myers et al. article about optimal identity development. As the authors write,

“If one’s identity and worth are based on the material, it may be subject to constant flux and may not provide the stability, and thus the sense of security and harmony, that a solidly grounded sense of self requires [...]. The purpose of life and its meaning come into clearer focus as human beings recognize how self is connected with all of life” (Myers et al. 1991:56).

The self within the optimal conceptual system is seen as multidimensional, encompassing community, worthy because they are unique expressions of spiritual energy (ibid.). The intrinsic feelings of worth and value come from that of connecting to a spiritual community.

A story from one of my informants explains this duality quite perfectly. He was attending his first Taizé prayer in Hamburg.

“I came to my first prayer in Hamburg, that starts from one of the *Alleluias*, and I have started to sing and I felt this joy, like [a] fountain in me. And suddenly I have looked at a woman, who was sitting a little far from me, ten, maybe twenty people between us. And I looked at her, and she looked at me, and I saw her eyes and she saw my eyes, and somehow we immediately understood that we feel the same” (Personal interview 4).

He recounts it as a very intimate experience, the intrinsic feeling of joy, and the sensation of communicating that with others, without words. He recounts his first prayer as a life-changing experience.

### **2.3.2 A Radical Peace**

*“Donna nobis pacem cordium” (Songs from Taizé 2010:65).*

Taizé has a very well developed idea of peace that begins on a personal level, and expands out to include reconciliation between Christians, Christians and the secular world, and Christians and other religious groups. I have chosen to call this subchapter “A radical peace”, as some of the practices in Taizé are quite radical in a European perspective. Again, it is the fundamental duality that comes into focus; a reconciled heart (individual) and reconciliation between segregated groups (interpersonal and community). Following up on Angela Merkels’ statement, the media portrays a world in which there is a growing edginess especially between the Muslim values and secular values. The September 11 attacks upon the US, followed by the US-launched war on terror, are the utmost expressions of what such queasiness can grow into; actual, extreme acts of violence. But it is desperation on a personal level that culminates into such acts of violence. Asif Ali Zardari shares the thoughts of his murdered wife Benazir Bhutto in the Washington Post, saying “There is an internal tension within Muslim society. The failure to resolve that tension peacefully and rationally threatens to degenerate into a collision course of values spilling into a clash between Islam and the West” (Zardari 2011 [online]). The importance of dialogue and mutual respect cannot be understated. Taizé is very much a mini-society that can be used as an example of successful dialogue between such groups.

Before heading on with the reconciliation process in Taizé, it is worthwhile to look at the word’s actual definition within the Church. In the Roman Catholic Church reconciliation may refer to “a sacrament in which repentant sinners are absolved and gain reconciliation with God and the Church, on condition of confession of their sins to a priest and of

performing a penance” (The free dictionary [online]). Wikipedia mentions several definitions for the term, the above religious, conflict resolution, and the ethnic term which is defined by “restoring mutual respect between individuals from different cultural backgrounds” ([online]), amongst others. Taizé does not practise the confession for visitors, but there are nevertheless possibilities for conversations with brothers or sisters that may have a clarifying function for the individual. In Taizé, reconciliation will most often refer to that of restoring mutual respect between both individuals and groups from different cultural backgrounds.

In Taizé, peace begins on a personal level. “[...] peace has to start within us, it has to start within us. Otherwise, it will not last” (br. Alois). The Prior repeated these words with emphasis, suggesting that bringing peace into the world is futile unless the individual has peace at heart. The prayers in Taizé facilitate an individual experience of peace, with songs that express this view. The one-phrase song “*Dona nobis pacem cordium*”, in English “Grant us peace of heart” (Songs from Taizé 2010:65), is sung as a mantra in the prayers at Taizé, repeated over and over again, with the intention that the lyrics sink into the worshipper. The even simpler phrase “*Da pacem cordium*”, “Give peace to our hearts” (ibid.55), is sung as a canon in the prayers. The intention in the repetitions is that these words will sink into the worshipper, and that he truly experiences peace at heart in the prayer. Two of the informants that I spoke to expressed that the sense of inner peace was perhaps the core experience from the prayers (Personal interviews 1 and 3). The songs do contribute to that experience. But as the feeling of peace is intrinsic, it is also a feeling that comes from community, and particularly in the multicultural community that Taizé is.

### **Reconciliation and forgiveness**

Within Christianity forgiveness is central to reconciliation. Br. Roger (2000) wrote about reconciliation, and referred to the Bible in ushering a reconciliation without delay: “When you are bringing your gift to the altar and your sister or brother has something against you, leave everything; first go and be reconciled” (Matthew 18:21-22). One of the

informants that I spoke to had, prior to the interview, spent three days in silence. I asked him about that experience and the personal process that he went through, and he answered me that “there were searching thoughts that came to mind [...], like one of the main areas that I was thinking about a lot was forgiveness, and what forgiveness is, and how to enact that in my life, because it’s not easy” (personal interview 3). Forgiveness had been a theme for his whole trip, as it was part of br. Alois letter and was discussed in the Bible introductions. He interpreted it as a conscious choice, and not a passive one. “Forgiving is not ignoring [...]. I think sometimes it’s easy to say; well, because I haven’t thought about this in a while, then I’ve walked in forgiveness [...]. Well, maybe that’s not so much the case. Maybe I’ve just been ignoring the situation” (ibid.). Br. Roger wrote “Forgive and then forgive again. That is the highest expression of loving” (2000:26). This idea is a core thought to Taizé, and has been further developed by the new Prior. The Prior expresses the same view of forgiveness as the informant, that forgiveness does not mean forgetting offences, and he explains further that “the message of forgiveness can never be used to condone injustice” (br. Alois 2011), thus separating forgiveness from acceptance. There are also personal difficulties with forgiveness, and the Prior was asked about that; what to do when forgiving seemed difficult or impossible.

“Sometimes we can wait with our reactions. Not react too quickly [...] not react out of being angry [...]. It’s not easy, because there are situations where we cannot forgive, sometimes, but not a lot. But there are really, when people were hurt and have wounds for their life, and then to say; I should forgive, sometimes. It’s almost impossible, even to think of that. So what can we do in these situations? Perhaps keep alive the desire somewhere. I know that I would like to forgive, even if I cannot now. It’s already keeping the door open, yes?” (br. Alois).

What I interpret from this, is that forgiveness is not a dogma that Taizé teaches; that the individual should or must forgive. It is rather a call to try, to not close the opportunity altogether, and to have patience in that process. “[...] We need a lot of patience, and try to live forgiveness. Try to live forgiveness, what Christ gave us, forgiveness, yes” (br. Alois). In Taizé, this does not only apply to the relationship between two individuals, but also on a larger scale; of overcoming group segregation and cultural clashes, hatred even. The Pilgrimage of Trust refers to this duality, it is “first of all a meeting; with the Risen Christ *and* with others [...]. Through sharing and hospitality, everyone agrees to

overcome barriers and differences in order to welcome and enrich one another” (Taizé 2007 [online], my emphasis).

### **Integration vs Segregation**

Reconciliation within Taizé ideals, is not only between different Christians, but also between other religious and non-religious groups. Taizé focuses on the dialogue between such groups first and foremost, a dialogue that aims to respect and understand each other.

“[...] yes we can expect reconciliation and mutual understanding, and a dialogue also between believers and non-believers also. Very important today, to find an understanding, a mutual understanding, yes. Even for some, or many of us, even in our families already no? Believing, non-believing, practising, going to church, not going to church, and, so how can we speak about that, or understand each other” (br. Alois).

As recounted in the historical background, the founder of the community sheltered Jewish war-refugees in the very beginning of the community. Today, the brothers manage to have a dialogue with many different groups through their prayers on a global scale. This happens as there are Taizé prayers arranged. These prayers have contributed, in their local areas, to dialogue between Croatians and Serbians, Bolivians and Chilenians, Christians and non-Christians, and most prominently Christians and Muslims. In December 2006, the regional meetings took place in Zagreb, Croatia, and it was during these prayers that “Croatian families welcomed into their homes some of the young Serbians who had come for the five days of prayer and sharing; so soon after the war that had torn these two peoples apart” (Taizé 2007 [online]). Furthermore, the Prior spoke to the group about the prayers in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Hertzevovina, in September 2010, where the brothers were invited by the Cardinal in the city. “We had workshops in different places, in the Orthodox Church, in the synagogue [...] and we had workshop also in the mosque, and in the Islamic high school, that is the Islamic university that is in Sarajevo. And we met people who really want a dialogue, and who say; we have to build our future together now” (br. Alois). The one thing of particular interest here is the cooperation with the Muslims in the city. Orthodox Christians have from the very beginning been welcomed in Taizé, so that there was cooperation with the Orthodox church in Sarajevo points to the ecumenism of Taizé. However, the picture drawn in the newsworld speaks



of tensions between Muslims and the West. Br. Stephen and I conversed about this topic, and he spoke to me about the regional meeting in Rotterdam in December 2010, which was quite recent at that time. During these prayers there was cooperation between many different groups, Protestant and Catholics, and also Muslims were cooperative in arranging the meeting.

“I mean, the meeting we just had in Rotterdam, the Protestant youth service and the Catholic youth service, I mean, I think it’s the first time that they’ve seriously worked together, for a five-month period, with the same goals and objectives. Also these meetings are incredible. The mayor of Rotterdam is a Muslim, and was very supportive of the meeting. There were young people staying in Muslim families in Rotterdam, there were workshops on in the afternoon in the mosque, while the mayor and the bishop talked about, you know, what can we live together in the city, how can we improve life in the city” (br. Stephen).

What I gathered from br. Stephen in these conversations, is that the focus is on what these groups actually do have in common. To live together in the city, and to improve life in the city, are such common goals that can be shared for both Christians and Muslims. We also spoke about how to begin a dialogue, and from what I understood, that dialogue does not have the intention of converting the other person. Rather, br. Stephen spoke about such simple things as wishing your neighbours well on their religious holidays, telling them about ours, and perhaps offering them Christmas cookies. I interpret that the intention is to create a relationship rather than convert them to Christianity. Such an attitude would serve to close the gap between the segregated groups. The Prior also spoke about the personal meetings as the starting point of reconciliation: “We believe very much in the personal meetings, going towards others” (br. Alois). According to br. Alois, the commitment to peace was not something that was made in one place and not followed up elsewhere, but it begins in the close relationships, in the families and with the neighbours in the local area. He followed up giving us examples from the regional meetings in different places in the world, where people had taken initiative to reconcile, saying; “We can say this is naïve, but perhaps such initiatives had in history more effect than we know. We should not become discouraged. We have to continue, for reconciliation, for peace” (br. Alois).

## **The Sacred individual**

The radical commitment to peace and reconciliation that Taizé encourages, springs out from their view of the individual. When I spoke to br. Stephen, he clarified the philosophy behind this. To my understanding, it derives from the creation in Genesis: “Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7). Many Christians also interpret this breath as the Holy Spirit. According to this view, the breath of God, or the Holy Sprit, lives in every person, and thus there is a spark of God alive in every individual. As the guidelines to prepare a prayer also spoke about discovering a Presence in the depth of the being (Taizé 2003 [online]), there are several indications of this view. To recognise that every individual contains God in an essence would promote a pacifist attitude. One of the people I interviewed spoke about the idea of pacifism, saying “[...] it’s impossible to be a passive pacifist, you have to be an active pacifist, like you have to be pursuing peace. Peace isn’t something that happens to you, it’s something that you pursue, that you engage with” (Personal interview 3). Although he spoke of his personal view of pacifism, I think his statement also sums up much of the attitude of Taizé in that they pursue peace, they speak about it and encourage their young visitors to overcome barriers and to create dialogue.

If we again go back to the Myers et al. article, spirituality leads to intrinsic feelings of worth and value, as opposed to a self-identity that is based on the suboptimal system. In the suboptimal system, self-worth is based on external validation, it is based on the grounds of comparison. To recognise the spiritual energy in, primarily oneself, and then others, would lead to an optimal identity development. A community that encourages and practises this view would be a community with a positive development.

## **Peace on Earth**

One of the phrases that is much heard in Taizé, is “peace on earth”, and in this community, that is not an outdated idea. It begins with the personal meetings in the local areas. The Prior was confronted with the difficulties and the naïvity of this idea, and he

responded that: “Probably it always seemed a naïve idea [...] But we believe in peace, that this is possible, it’s possible. And every one of us can do something for peace. We can go to others, we can go to others. Overcome some borders, some barriers, first in our surroundings, with the people who are close to us” (br. Alois). As such, there is a personal responsibility that lies at the heart of the idea, that the individual begins practising this in his or hers close surroundings. Taizé ushers the individual steps towards peace as they arrange prayers throughout the world. The Prior recounted several stories as examples of overcoming barriers, both on a personal and local scale, but also in between nations that had been in conflict. From the individual overcoming personal barriers, peace extends into interpersonal relations and into the vision of peace on a global scale.

### **3. PHENOMENOLOGY: EXPERIENCED AND EXPRESSED**

In this chapter I will look more closely at religious phenomenology. In an attempt to organise this, I have used some of the categories that Eliade (1987) has identified, in addition to some categories identified in the Myers et al. article. The categories that I have chosen to use emerged through the interviews. I will also discuss the aspect of time, both how time is experienced and how the prayer rituals relate to mythological time. The Nietz and Spickard article highlights the importance of religious experience to the social sciences, drawing the attention to how “[...] the call to ‘let Jesus into your life,’ for example, is not a conceptual but a experiential act” (1990:16). All these theories highlight the importance of religious experience and offer an explanation of religious behaviour. I will discuss both the individual experience and how the prayers are arranged to allow for a sacred experience. My aim is that the empiricism will elucidate how phenomenology is experienced by the individual, and how this experience is intrinsic to the identity and self-esteem of the individual.

The reader may question the importance of religious experiences to this study, as the informants are too limited to be making any generalised statements. Much of this is built upon the Myers et al. article that has been discussed earlier. The authors discuss the importance of spirituality to a positive identity development. “Within the context of optimal psychology from which our identity development model emerges, spirituality is reconceptualized to be an essential aspect of being. Consequently, spiritual development is an integral part of identity development” (Myers et al. 1991:57).

#### **Defining spirituality**

To define spirituality the Myers et al. article takes into account previous discussions within the field, mentioning such phrasing as “transcendent dimension of human experience”, “the courage to look within and to trust a deep sense of belonging, wholeness, connectedness, and openness to the infinite”, “a clarification of perception, an insight into the nature of ‘how-things-really-are’” (ibid.), the last one sounding much like

Eliades' phenomenology of religious experience as the *really real* (1987). The definition of spirituality that is consistent with optimal theory is “ [...] a way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life, and whatever people consider to be the ‘ultimate’”, following that in optimal theory the values regarding self, others, nature, life, and the ultimate have to be in accord with peace, love, harmony, and justice (Myers et al. 1991:57). Many of these values are discussed in chapter 2, and according to this definition the religious practice in Taizé is highly spiritual. For this study then, the community of Taizé is absolutely relevant. Further into the article on optimal conceptualisation, the authors bring in the six stages of spiritual development as identified by Fowler, saying that both Fowler's model and optimal theory

“conceptualise growth as a broadening and expansion of worldview. This movement begins with dependency on the vision and beliefs of significant others, followed by individuation and understanding of people's unique ideals and values. Connection of community strengthens the journey and allows for increasing commitment to understanding, which ultimately leads to integration of all aspects of self and awareness of the universality of the human experience. In stage 6, universalizing faith, people become aware of the ultimate context of life and seek to incorporate their own being with a sense of the cosmic. At this level, individuals are capable of transcending apparent conflicts within society while understanding the role these conflicts may play in a larger scheme of existence” (Myers et al. 1991:57).

People at Taizé are encouraged to transcend apparent conflicts within society, and initiate dialogue between estranged groups within society, such as Christians and non-Christians, or Christians and Muslims, without the intention to have them convert to Christianity or become members of their community. The expansion of worldview in a mature faith grows beyond the dependency on significant others and includes the connection to a community. Furthermore, the search to incorporate one's own being with a sense of the cosmic, is a formulation that covers much of religious activity. That formulation brings us on to discuss further some of the aspects of phenomenology.

### 3.1 Reality differentiated

Understanding religious behaviour begins by studying the intentions behind such behaviour. Eliade immediately differentiates the totality of life-experience between the religious and the non-religious person, saying that: “Our chief concern [...] will be to elucidate this subject – to show in what ways religious man attempts to remain as long as possible in a sacred universe, and hence that his total experience of life proves to be in comparison with the experience of the man without religious feeling [...]” (Eliade 1987:13). The main interest for this thesis is to look at how the prayers of Taizé aids to construct a religious universe for the individual. Eliade explains about the sacred that it is “[...]saturated with *being*. Sacred power means reality and at the same time enduringness and efficacy. The polarity sacred-profane is often expressed as an opposition between *real* and *unreal* or pseudoreal[...]. Thus it is easy to understand that religious man deeply desires *to be*, to participate in *reality*, to be saturated with power” (ibid:12-13).

Reality is differentiated for the religious person. Both the prayers and the community of Taizé construct an opportunity to experience that on a personal level and an interpersonal level. Although there are many different classifications in phenomenology, I will focus on those most relevant for studying Taizé.

#### 3.1.1 A Holy Place

“For religious man, space is not homogeneous” (Eliade 1987:20). There is a qualitative difference between sacred space, the really real, and “all other space, the formless expanse surrounding it” (ibid). The revelation of such a sacred space is made possible through a hierophany, a manifestation of the sacred. For the people that I interviewed, it was not only a visual image or audible sign that was interpreted as a manifestation of the sacred. Some particular emotions were interpreted as the presence of God, and in particular the internationality in the prayers was something viewed as holy. The manifestation of the sacred creates a holy place for the religious person, and it reveals a fixed point from whence to orient oneself. Whithin Christianity the church is such a

sacred space, but it is not only the church that can be a holy place. Lia Gård is often referred to as a “thin place”, a place in which the veil that separates the sacred and the profane world is thinner. In the picture-book dedicated to Lia Gård, Mandt writes:

“Some locations are ‘thin places’. In moments, the borders between heavenly glory and earthly reality are almost erased. It is as if God himself pervades the wind and the air, the landscape and the pathways.[...] Heaven does not turn its back upon us. Heaven does not have a back. And earth is after all sacred” (Mandt&Berg 2006:14, my translation).

This quote sums up what is meant by “thin places”; a place where people experience that the presence of God permeates ordinary things. For many people, this experience sums up to be a hierophany<sup>21</sup>, or as many Christians simply may express; God is very present there.

Eliade (1987) explains that such hierophanies organise the world for religious people; the manifestation of the sacred creates cosmos; the organised world as related to chaos, which is the threatening expanse surrounding it. From quite early on in my religious studies I have been introduced to the cosmos-chaos myth that is to be found in different expressions in plural religions. It is characteristic for traditional societies that there is an assumed contrast or opposition between inhabited lands and the unknown expanse surrounding it (Eliade 1987:29). But the inhabited land represents cosmos because it has first been consecrated by the gods. “The world (that is, our world) is a universe within which the sacred has already manifested itself, in which, consequently, the break-through from plane to plane has become possible and repeatable” (ibid:30). It is in this universe that religious people desire to live. The connection to the divine reveals the absolute reality from whence religious people can orient themselves. The planes of existence that Eliade writes about can mainly be divided into three; the underworld, land of the dead, or hell; the human realm; and the heavens, or the realm of the divine. The consecrated space is represented with symbols, and Eliade (1987) writes of the rising of altars or the *axis mundi*, a symbol that pierces three cosmological realms, at the beginning of a settlement. The *axis mundi* may be represented as a tree, a pillar, a totempole, or a cross to mention some. The common denominator is that it somehow connects the three realms of

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<sup>21</sup> A hierophany is a manifestation of the sacred.

existence. In Christianity the cross represents a crucifixion in the human realm, Christs' passage through death (the land of the dead) and his suspension into the heavens (the right hand of God). The Icon of Resurrection in the Church of Reconciliation depicts part of that aspect. Symbols such as *axix mundi* represent the centre of the world, they represent cosmos. When the gods reveal themselves, they reveal a "thin point" in the world, a place which is sacred. As already mentioned, the religious man deeply desires to live saturated, - to live close to the gods.

The chapel or churchroom is the most tangible holy place within Christianity. There is a qualitative difference between the churchroom and the room outside, marked by a visible transition: the threshold, or the door. "The door that opens on the interior of the church actually signifies a solution of continuity" (Eliade 1987:25). In Taizé, this is further marked by the signs of "Silence" upon approach. The fact that there is no conversation within the churchroom adds to the notion that this is a different place, and people are expected to behave differently within that room. Already upon arrival church-goers feel that this space is qualitatively different from the outside, and the mind-set changes to prepare for prayer. The church-bells ring as a reminder that a different time is starting, a time that people spend connected to the religious universe. The signs of silence and the churchbells are both items or actions that contribute to creating a sacred place and a sacred time. They serve as a reminder that this time and place is qualitatively different, the church and the prayer do take place in the realm of the living, but have another dimension added to them; the realm of the divine steps closer.

The Church of Reconciliation is constructed by means of a German cooperation (Santos 2008:66). However, br. Roger chose to settle in the village as he was moved by the appeal of a poor woman years earlier. As Santos explains "In his spirit, he knew that Christ speaks through the poor; consequently, he decided to purchase the house" (ibid.:59). At first, the brothers prayed in the village church, but as the masses of young people that came to pray with the brothers grew, they could no longer fit into the tiny village church in Taizé. And br. Roger, the founder, "actually lamented the building of the new church" (ibid.:68). It was not until he exited the church one day and saw the



rainbow in the sky, to him a divine sign that God would fill the ark, that he felt at peace with the new grand construction (ibid. 68-69). For the religious person such signs add to the experience of a sacred place. I interpret that the Prior needed to feel like he was *meant* to be there, that God had intentions for him and the new church. For the founder, it was the divine intention that made the place sacred. The process of inhabiting a new place for the religious person is connected to that of making cosmos out of chaos. In a certain sense that involves connecting the new place, not only to sacrality, but also to the creation of the universe. “What is to become ‘our world’ must first be ‘created’, and every creation has a paradigmatic model – the creation of the universe by the gods” (Eliade 1987:31). When it comes to Christianity, a sacred place needs to connect to a certain extent to the life of Jesus. This becomes clear when looking at how the prayer in Taizé derives from the prayers in the synagogue.

### **3.1.2 Music constructs a place**

A further theory that I think is relevant to the chapter on sacred places, is the theory of music, identity and place, and how music can construct a place. An article written by Knutsen (2004) builds on the earlier work of Stokes (1994). In Knutsen’s article (2004), he discusses recent work within musicology that has focused on the thought that music can be understood as a practise that constructs a place. The focus is on how music is used as a tool in the social construction of social structures, identity, and geographical place (Knutsen 2004:1). “It is argued that music is a more or less conscious human *strategy* that ‘constructs place’ by stimulating and organising memories, emotions and experiences. This happens with an intensity, simplicity and power that surpasses any other kind of social activity” (ibid. my translation). In this article the discussion is around immigrant communities, and it is a case study of Chilean immigrants and their celebrations in Oslo. The Chilean music and dances reconstruct their previous home, and is an expression of homesickness. As the author writes; “Music performance in this context is not about creating connections to the place where one lives, but to the place where one would like to live; the place one left and still feels a strong belonging to” (Knutsen 2004:3 my translation). There is both a past and a future dimension to this, in Christianity there is

both the time of Jesus, and the (present and) future kingdom of God. Eliade argues that within religion there is a desire to live in the world of the beginning, “to live in the world as it came from the Creator’s hands” , and he calls this a nostalgia for paradise (Eliade 1987:92), but I believe that nostalgia for paradise is not just a nostalgia for what *was* but it is also a dream for the future.

My theory here is that music in this sense constructs a sacred place, it stimulates and organises memories, emotions and experiences with both a divine and a social dimension to them. The intensity within a religious setting is perhaps much stronger than any other setting. The lyrics of the songs may be a contributor to such experiences of creating a sacred place:

*“The kingdom of God is justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.  
Come, Lord, and open in us the gates of your kingdom” (Songs from Taizé 2010:115)*

Within this I interpret a desire to invoke the kingdom of God within the prayer. The importance of hierophanies for sacred places may also be expressed directly in the songs.

*“See, I am near, says the Lord. See, I make all things new” (ibid.:102)*

The presence of the divinity brings along with it a new creation, as in the “I make all things new” (ibid.). The hierophany, the revelation of the divine, recreates the world. For this chapter, I want to put forward a theory that religious music can construct a sacred place, a place with a different reality, a place that transcends the normal world. It becomes clear that within the Taizé prayers there is a longing for a connection with the sacred. In the discussion on sacred places there are many factors present that I have tried to portray here. Kubicki skilfully sums up the symbolic representation of icons and songs as contributors to creating a sacred dimension to the prayers when she discusses the symbolic role of Taizé’s music in the prayer and in the community. She refers to Walter Ong’s description of an “acoustic space”:

“The singing of the chants occurs in the great Church of Reconciliation which is positioned both physically and existentially at the center of the pilgrimage experience. The brothers, in turn, are positioned in the center of the church. The music-making, like the icons and candles placed within the church, contributes to an experience of the building as a sacred space. That is, singing the Taizé chants pervades the ritual prayer to such an extent that it can be said to create a sonic environment in which the doing of the ritual takes place” (Kubicki 1999:143)

This sonic environment is an important contributor to the religious experience that creates the sacred place. Such a sacred place needs to make visible plural dimensions of reality as experienced by the worshiper. Kubicki has identified how the Taizé-songs enable this experience:

“The music allows the worshiper to step outside of *chronos* into a space ‘between and betwixt,’ for the duration of the music-making. In this space, the music provides an experience of transcending barriers, not only between pilgrims, but also between the human and the divine. In this sense, Taizé liturgy provides worshipers with sacred symbols and cultural structures, e.g. the Berthier chants which can facilitate communion with the God of Jesus Christ” (Kubicki 1999:144).

### **3.2 A deep sense of belonging, connectedness and unity**

Within Christianity there is an aspect of holiness connected to the unity of all Christians. That unity is expressed in Christ's prayer preceding the Passion, it has thus been given great significance within Christianity.

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one – I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:20-23)

The prayer is that all Christians will be brought to complete unity. The Church of Reconciliation is a powerful symbol of that unity, as Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians all come to pray together in this place. There are not only different traditions within Christianity there, but also vastly different cultures pray together in the church. Kubicki states about the prayers of Taizé that “[...] while they profess the Christian belief that redemption has been won through Jesus Christ, [...] they continue to experience its

unfolding in their life together as they live in joyful hope for the coming of the Kingdom when the unity prayed for by Christ will at last be realized” (Kubicky 1999:138). That unity is a unity of both cultures and traditions. Kubicki has also identified that the reconciliation of Christians is the primary goal for all rituals seen in Taizé, even such as the sharing of meals, and the sharing-groups.

“Both the writings of Brother Roger Schutz and Brother Max Thurian attest to the centrality of this purpose. In addition, there is the broader goal of achieving reconciliation among all people who suffer any type of alienation and/or are separated by barriers of creed, race, national origin, language, or economic status” (1999:136).

Both rituals and community-life at Taizé create an atmosphere that mirrors Christ’s prayer for unity. The multicultural prayer in the Church of Reconciliation creates a moment in and out of time, where that unity and the hopes for a future kingdom is very present.

When I was conducting the interviews I was not really aware of the sense of connectedness and unity that was felt through the presence of others. I thought the main category would be how they experienced a divine presence, but through the interviews people highlighted how multiculturalism and unity despite cultural differences was experienced as something holy. In most Taizé arrangements people live in community, an experience that is quite intense and all encompassing. The unity is practised in the community life, and it culminates in the prayers.

“What’s very special about Taizé is how many there are present. And then you have really simple songs, a few lines, and then you can sing it in Norwegian, you can sing it in English, Latin, really any kind of language. It is a special experience then, that for example several thousands sing a song in Latvian, that maybe a hundred of them knows. At the same time you’re together about it. You’re together about sharing a prayer, to worship God. Then language and countries and backgrounds and such don’t matter as much anymore, what matters is that we’re here wishing to worship God” (Personal interview 1).

There are several aspects to the multiculturalism at the prayers. It creates a connection between individuals of different cultural backgrounds, and it engages people with cultures they normally would not have any connection to. To engage so many different languages is a sign of respect, love and compassion for the others. The other dimension

of unity is that sharing a prayer also connects people on a spiritual level, which creates an even deeper sense of belonging. That connection expresses the unity in Christs' prayer.

“And I think also that there, very obviously a drawing point of Taizé, is that there is people from all over the world here, and we sing in all their languages as well, and...so, I think that there is something of respect for other people in that. I think that's also something of what Gods Kingdom is really like, in all of that. That it's not...Gods Kingdom isn't [...] America, or anything else, it brings pieces of all of Gods people together in one [...]” (Personal interview 3).

The expression “Gods Kingdom” is not easily defined within Christian theology. From my own experience in Christian churches, I believe it is used two-dimensionally; that Gods Kingdom is in the now as it also is in the future. It happens *within* and *between* Christians, but it is also a hope of a future kingdom<sup>22</sup>. The informant was asked further whether he thought the prayers represented his idea of that kingdom.

“Yeah, I mean, one of the highlights is the, in Rotterdam, in the morning, when we were meeting other churches, we would say the ‘Our Father’, but everyone would say it in their own language. And so you'd be sitting, there is, in my church, there is probably about two hundred of us, from maybe like a dozen different countries, so you'd just hear the Our Father in all of these different languages all at once which, there is something special, unique, and I think quite holy about that moment” (Personal interview 3).

The fourth informant was from a very different background than the other three that I interviewed. To him, Taizé was somewhere he felt deeply accepted and in a sense he felt that he belonged to the community.

“[...] You know [the] first thing I felt, it was very comfortable feeling, because I felt that I have somehow guarantee now. Because I knew that I will never be unhappy to the end, because whatever happens, whatever life will hurt me, I always can come to Taizé, and I will be happy here, whatever happens. So I felt. So, somewhere it's very easy to live, when you know that somewhere there is your place, which you know which will never reject you, where the people love you. Yes, I feel like I'm now protected somehow, it's very easy to live with having such protection” (Personal interview 4).

When I asked him if he felt he had found a spiritual home, he confirmed this. It is quite a testimony to Taizé that someone from such a different background can feel so connected to that place. He felt protected by knowing that he belonged somewhere. But it is a hope for the future that also marks his experience: “I also believe in, maybe sometime all people will live like brothers, there'll be no war, and we will look at each other and see in

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<sup>22</sup> From the passage Luke 17:21, “[...] the kingdom of God is in your midst”, can also be translated “within you”.

each others eyes not a stranger, but the person with their nation, or colour” (ibid.). Another thing that he mentioned was how the prayers were experienced differently through the presence of a brother. Listening to songs or prayers through a CD, did not give the same experience as being in Taizé. Being with the brothers was very different. He explained that “I think that [the brothers] pray very concentratedly, you just enter into *their* prayer, you know it’s different” (ibid.). The presence of the brothers helps him to pray. One particular prayer highlighted this to him:

“I had that feeling in [an] Orthodox church, because one of the brothers came to us, to Moscow. And he was with us to the Orthodox prayer, which have very different melodies, very different tradition etc. But somehow, being with him and praying near him was just the same feeling like in Taizé” (ibid.).

This adds another aspect to the concept of community; it is not just between different peoples, but also between brothers and visitors that a special connection is felt.

Participating in Taizé prayers creates a strong sense of community for the individuals that I have spoken to. But it is not just the prayers that create that sense of community; in Taizé, people also participate and cooperate outwith prayers. There are sharing groups that function as a forum for discussion, and everyone is asked to participate in daily chores such as cleaning and cooking. One informant told me, when I asked if it was anything special he wanted to highlight about Taizé, that “it’s both a prayer and working community [...] And then it is such a secure and good place to be at” (Personal interview 1). So even work adds to the community-feeling. Br. Jean-Marie spoke about how people are quite close to one another while serving food, and I think that the daily chores are also a way of creating relationships. The whole environment of community living is constructed so that people share lives with one another, and thus they are able to overcome borders such as language, ethnicity, and culture.

### 3.3 A transcendent dimension

The transcendent dimension refers to the individual experience of connecting with God. Through the empiri I discovered that the informants would often interpret certain feelings and emotions as signs of Gods presence. The thing that is most striking however, is how different these experiences are. Although the sense of peace was something that several of the informants felt, there are other stories that strengthen a theory of a very subjective experience. Sometimes these experiences were contrary to what was expected by the informants themselves.

“And do you experience a presence?”

“Yeah, perhaps. It depends on how you define presence.”

“Say well, the simple question; do you meet God?”

“Yeah. I would say yes. But I would also say that I think some people, myself included, has this expectation at times of what it looks like to meet God, and what presence looks like, and so; I’m gonna hear an audible voice, or I’m gonna feel a specific feeling, and I don’t know that that happens very often for me. And not just in Taizé prayer, but just in general, I don’t know that that happens very often for me. But I would say that nonetheless, I do experience presence of God like a, I mean in a way that it quickens things to mind, and brings connections right there. And I think even more in the way that it speaks peace into life. There’s a very calming presence about the community here that’s...you know, it’s a bit overwhelming to think about going back home and everything that home entails” (Personal interview 3).

The hesitation in the first answer may come from that he thought I expected an answer that included an audible voice or a vision. He interprets certain mental processes, like a clarification of perception, and the permeating experience of peace as a connection with God. That the place in itself is experienced as different becomes clear in the last phrase, where he indicates that going home will be a difficult transition.

The same hesitation was found in other interviews. The first informant told me that it was not necessarily the goal to experience that God spoke to him. “Experiencing that God talks to you is not necessarily the goal. The goal is as much to be present with God, to know that He is there and that I’m there, and that’s all that matters” (Personal interview 1). I asked him further about how that communication starts: “Well, it’s not easy to say. It’s perhaps...I start perhaps. As it is me who seeks out a place, and seeks out a place that

facilitates for for example a Taizé prayer [...]” (ibid.). In this he interprets a search for that communication in his own actions. But also the music contributes to that communication.

“But do you experience a dialogue for example within in the music, while you’re singing?”

“Yes, what I think is really special about the Taizé-songs, that I especially noticed when I was in Taizé [France], was a sort of inner peace. That now, I’m just here, and nothing else...I don’t care about anything else right now. It’s just me and God here, yes, and then everyone else around I suppose, but we are here just with God” (Personal interview 1).

The experience of peace is central to him. But it is also “living in the moment” that he highlights as important; that being present and forgetting everything else was good for him. The last phrase points to the duality identified in Taizé, that it is an individual experience that happens in the middle of a community. The connection is also to the others that are present at the prayers.

This fundamental duality of the individual and the community is seen in the spiritual experiences that people have. The second person that I interviewed at Lia spoke of God as an energy, and in the same phrase she said “I think you meet God concretely through other people” (Personal interview 2). For her, the presence of God was felt both as an energy and through other people. The energy that she spoke of had a rather mysterious and intimate character:

“God is a kind of energy, that you can’t understand, that we only understand through our earthly things. Except when we experience such things that we don’t understand, small wonders, and that we...the feeling that someone holds you hands, even if nobody does.”

“Do you experience that physically?”

“Yes, when you hold your hands like this [palm upward]. I thought that was pretty weird before, it scared me when people sat like that. But then suddenly I just did it, probably in Taizé, and then it was totally like it was tingling, you feel it is something...something, an energy then” (Personal interview 2).

It was especially one of the prayers in Taizé in France that was a turning point for her. She got to know another person in the community that she used to go to prayers with, and she told me how that person had prayed for her that whole week. “And then it was probably on Thursday, that I just got this thing where I just cried, and I had to talk to her and say that; I just think that I...I think I believe now. Believe in God. And for her that



was really powerful, because she felt that she had prayed so much about it” (ibid.). That special community is also felt through the singing in the prayers. “The community is that you want the same. You want peace, you want...you want to live the good life, everyone wants what’s good. And then I’ve had the experience, you know, like I feel embraced in a way, through such singing and silence” (ibid.). For her, the singing was an important part of the whole experience of Taizé. As there is lots of singing conjoined with late nights, she often got sore and hoarse, and was not able to sing that well. She recounted that as a frustrating feeling, but she told me that twice she experienced getting instantly better during the prayer.

Many of the informants hesitated when I asked about communication with God. As it is a very personal question, I think it was both difficult to communicate and difficult to actually phrase. But I also think that the informants had a preconception of what a hierophany is, like that of an audible voice or a vision, and perhaps they felt that their experience did not fit into that conception. I think the differences in the answers strengthen the theory of subjectivity. A strong influence or norm to such experiences would render more similar answers, that they are different speaks for individuality.

### **3.4 A clarification of perception**

Going back to the world of Eliade (1987), a sacred place is sacred because it has a connection upwards. The multiple dimensions in the Christian worldview may be experienced as a change of foci. It can be explained as a three-dimensional picture; when the human adjusts the focus of the eyes, a different reality is revealed in the picture at hand. Such an experience is often interpreted as a divine intervention, not that it is the divine that comes into focus, but that the connection with the divine enables a right kind of focus for the religious person. As was quoted above, the third person that I interviewed experienced presence of God “[...] in a way that it quickens things to mind, and brings connections right there” (Personal interview 3). He explained further that “[...] there was

definitely a certain sense of personality, of individuality, that God was speaking to me through the songs, in ways that seemed; ‘ah, that connects to what I’ve been thinking about today’” (ibid.). I would explain this as a clarification or a change of perception. Another perspective on that was seen in the first interview, where the informant said that: “I suppose I experience that the world around is maybe not that important, that it becomes distant” (Personal interview 1). There is a change of focus here, a shift in the normal arrangements of foci, where the world around steps back and the self emerges as the centre.

“What becomes important is really me I often feel. That it is a way of working with one self for good or for bad. But I think that has as much to do with the fact that suddenly you have time for it then. You don’t have a tv, or computer, or anything else to take up your time, and I suppose you sit there and you have to fill your time with something and yes, you get to work with yourself too. Even if that means blocking everything out, or sit and assess what it is you’re doing these days” (Personal interview 1).

He used the prayers to reflect on his own life and his actions. During the silence he worked through issues kind of like a confession, he felt like he became aware of things that perhaps he should not have done. There was a similar account from the fourth informant: “Sometimes it makes me clean, so I think about my life [...]. Maybe I didn’t do something that I should do, did somebody wrong. So I try to think, how can I live better in a sense [...] with other people” (Personal interview 4).

As the prayers of Taizé create an environment for meditation, such a change of perception is quite a natural result from that. People also aim to reach a different state of mind, one of silence and peace:

“Well, it feels like an empty head. It’s...kind of a rare condition, that you don’t... It doesn’t happen normally that my head is completely blank. Even if I’m on the train and looking at the ceiling, there are things passing through my head. It’s kinda hard to grasp it, because it’s not something you think about in retrospect, that I should remember how I felt right then. But I suppose it’s a feeling of a blank head and maybe a little peace. Then there’s nothing keeping me back, it’s a place for both me and God” (Personal interview 1).

The three categories above are a construction that is useful for organising the phenomenological experiences. A deep sense of belonging, connectedness and unity, combined with a transcendent dimension of a human experience and a clarification of

perception are the categories that stand out in the interviews. But the conclusion that such experiences as the above can be called hierophanies is not given. Is this a revelation of the divine? To say an objective “yes” or “no” is not within my academic reach. What is initiated by the will of the self? And what is a result of the construction of a symbolic place? Even if divine communication is initiated by the self with a strong agency of the church, less of a hierophany, less of a divine revelation? Does that make it fake? These are questions that I have asked myself. For the people that I have interviewed, these experiences have powerfully formed their conception of both themselves and the world. I have to give credit to my informants, that they are telling me the truth *as they experience it*. These individual accounts are completely subjective, but looking at some of these subjective experiences, we might be able to see at a cross-section some of the things that happen within a churchroom.

### **3.5 The aspect of time**

Eliade writes that “the *time of origin* of a reality – that is, the time inaugurated by the first appearance of the reality – has a paradigmatic value and function; that is why man seeks to reactualize it periodically by means of appropriate rituals” (1987:85). The discussion will now move to discuss the aspect of time in Taizé rituals. That is both the ritualistic aspect of time as a regeneration of mythological time and how individuals experience time. Eliade writes that “*by its very nature sacred time is reversible* in the sense that, properly speaking, it is *a primordial mythical time made present*. Every religious festival, any liturgical time, represents the reactualization of a sacred event that took place in a mythical past, ‘in the beginning’” (1987:68). One aspect of time in the Taizé prayers is how they are arranged to create a closeness to Jesus, and another aspect is how the individuals experience time during the prayer.

### 3.5.1 Individual Time

I first started investigating if the individuals experienced “flow”, as identified by Neitz and Spickard (1990). The flow experience is a holistic experience that are characterised by selflessness, limited sensory input, and the match between the challenge of a task and one’s ability to complete it (1990:20). The fact that the individuals rather seem to experience a clarification of perspective in regard to self, that they become more aware of themselves and their actions through the prayer marks a clear distinction from the flow experience. However, the aspect of experienced time has certain similarities to flow, such as how time is often completely forgotten during the activity of prayer and song. “When I participate in prayer, I don’t think at all. I just *am*, a good exercise to be in the present moment. I think time passes quickly, and sometimes I just want to sing and sing and sing. We did that in Taizé [France] and sat up until late at night” (Personal interview 2). It is more a meditative aspect of time that emerges in this statement. Time fades into the background of a holistic experience of *being* in the present moment. I have the impression that forgetting time is actively sought by the informants, for them it appears a positive experience to forget the whole aspect of time during the prayer. The first person that I interviewed was accustomed to a liturgy of hours from Lia Gård, and to him, setting aside time for prayer throughout the day was a good experience. These times of prayer were a goal in and of themselves, as already quoted: “The goal is as much to be present with God, to know that he is there and that I’m there, and that’s all that matters” (Personal interview 1). He started attending his first Taizé prayers as a 15-16 year old and in the beginning “I almost counted the seconds, there were long...really long liturgies at that time, and I remember I counted how many times we repeated a song, to know how many times we would repeat the next one” (ibid.). The many repetitions in Taizé music are a striking feat, and I believe it is a process to get accustomed to the singing. The repetitive singing invokes a state of meditation, but that comes about after some time. For this informant it was a developing process: “These prayers are passing really fast now I think. And it’s not...I don’t know how to explain time, but it’s...I certainly don’t think about it, don’t think about time anymore” (ibid.). That developing process came about through living at Lia Gård with a liturgy of hours. But in Taizé prayer the aspect of time

fell away due to the simplicity in the prayer. “You kind of stop thinking when it becomes that simple” (ibid.).

The third person that I spoke to had spent three days in silence in the community, at the latter end of his whole stay in Taizé communauté. I thought the aspect of time through the days of silence would be fairly different from that in prayer, but again it is being in the present moment that stands out. Entering into silence was a process: “[...] it takes a while to, there’s a lot of things going on in my brain. I mean, some days it doesn’t seem like that, but there’s a lot of activity, there’s lots of things to think about, and so it takes, it’s like detox. Sort of trying to really let all those things go is a challenge” (Personal interview 3). Even as he spent days in silence the schedule of the day was fairly full. It was only between lunch and dinner that he had several hours of free time on his hands. “So these were the long chunks of time where activity would sort of cease, and you were like... ‘ok, so what now?’ And I took hikes. I hiked to different places and sort of allowed that, to be what I was doing” (ibid.). As he had been at the Rotterdam meeting directly before coming to the community, he had spent more or less three and a half weeks with Taizé prayers. “I think even the entirety of my life the last three and a half weeks has been lived at a different pace than what it usually is” (ibid.), as such I believe it is more of a wholesome experience of slowing down than just the times of prayer. The last three days of silence ended up being more of a sealing of that whole experience. He explained that:

“In some ways perhaps silence would have been much more dramatic for me if I had pursued it right on the front end of like, when I started my trip. But at this point, I’d spent so much time in quiet, and in solitude even, and in thinking things through, and in traddeling, and in all these things. There had been a lot of processing that had happened at this point, and silence for me ended up being more of a sealing of it, rather than opening up. [...] For me, it was much more like a, sort of like God had done all this work in me, and now we’re sealing it over, and ready to send you back” (Personal interview 3).

The aspect of time was something all four informants recalled fading away during prayer, in a sense that they became unaware of it, but also in a sense that they wished to be unaware of it. During the prayers, they actively tried to forget the aspect of time and aimed to enter into a state of being in the present moment. The same informant recalled that during the prayers

“I don’t really pay attention [...]. This is my only watch right now [mobile]. So it’s cumbersome and a mess to work with, which is good. I like it that way. I haven’t worn a watch on my wrist for years and years. I just don’t want to be driven by it [...] because I would. So during prayers then, I don’t think I’ve checked my watch the entire time” (ibid.).

The fourth informant similarly said

“I try to forget everything. [...] sometimes it’s very easy. Ok, now when the songs are not the ones that I’m used to, sometimes it is hard, because you know the first time that I came here, under my first meetings, sometimes I prayed forgetting everything, just feeling like the wave of some warm thing covering me just like this. But now it’s not always like this [...]” (Personal interview 4).

One thing several of the informants pointed out, was that the prayers were experienced differently from time to time. Some days they felt they could enter into meditation easily, other days it was more difficult. That depended on how they felt and their personal dispositions. The hours of the prayers were also important for their state of mind. As both morning and afternoon prayer are right before meals, the informants recalled being more impatient during these prayers. During evening prayers it was easier to enter into a deeper state of meditation.

### **3.5.2 Mythological Time**

Sacred time refers to a religious calendar of events that happened “in the beginning” and that is reactualised throughout the year; it is cyclic. The periodical feasts allow the religious man to link into sacred time, and thus the sacred takes part in his life. As quoted earlier, religious man deeply desires *to be*, to participate in *reality*, to be saturated with power, and the re-enactment of mythological time allows him to live in a periodic synchronisation with the gods. Periodic celebrations of sacred time links the religious man to this *reality* and gives meaning to life. Eliade (1987) strongly argues that one regenerates time as sacred time is reenacted, it is a symbolic recreation of the beginning that gives new life and strengthens the sacrality of the world. Such re-enactments of sacred time may take on different forms within a given religion. Within the different traditions of Christianity there is much variety. But the two key celebrations are found in all three; Christmas and Easter. These are particularly important for Christians.

Easter is the one feast most relevant for studying Taizé, as it marks the death and resurrection of Christ within Christianity. The death and resurrection of Christ is the very centre of the Christian belief, it is within this that the sinner is granted forgiveness and given new life. The death and resurrection of Christ marks the passage from death to life for every Christian, the really *real* life begins at the surrender at the Cross. The Christian dies with Christ on the cross, and resurrects a new being with Christ. Among several passages to choose from in the Bible, this is the one that describes the significance of Christ's death and resurrection best for the Christian believer:

“For we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be reunited with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. [...] In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Jesus Christ” (Rom 6:5-8, 11)

The origin of Christ's death and resurrection is reenacted in the liturgy of Easter. This event marks the beginning of a new life for the believer. Eliade (1987) explains that religious man lives in two kinds of time, and of those the sacred time is the most important.

“[...] sacred time, appears under the paradoxical aspect of a circular time, reversible and recoverable, a sort of eternal mythical present that is periodically reintegrated by means of rites. This attitude in regard to time suffices to distinguish religious from nonreligious man; the former refuses to live solely in what, in modern terms, is called the historical present; he attempts to regain a sacred time that, from one point of view, can be homologized to eternity” (1987:70).

To live in mythological time creates meaning in life for the religious person. As quoted earlier, the religious man deeply desires to participate in *reality*. If we view this theory in light of the Christian celebration it bears quite a significance. At Christmas, the Christian may periodically become contemporary with the birth of the Son of God on earth. Furthermore, in Easter, the Passion of Christ is regenerated, it is relived and reactualised. And thus the Christian again experiences the mystery of the death and resurrection that he deeply desires to participate in, - it saturates his life with power.

In Taizé in France, there is a symbolic celebration of the death and resurrection of Christ every week, or as one of the volunteers said; “In Taizé, Easter week is every week”. This happens with the prayer around the cross on Fridays, and the Eucharist mass on Sunday. The icon of the cross is brought forward during evening prayer for pilgrims to pray around, but this plays out somewhat differently on Friday evening prayers. On Friday the cross is laid down horizontally, resting upon bricks. Pilgrims make their way towards it, and while some just come and sit in front of it, many draw closer. They kneel down next to the cross and rest their foreheads upon it as they pray. At many prayers there is quite a line of pilgrims moving up towards the cross. This happens at the latter end of the prayer, which means that all regular liturgy, such as Scripture reading and silence has been done. It is as such an open time where people remain in church singing and praying, accompanied by the Taizé songs and candlelights. While in the community, I found that the brothers remained longer in the Church of Reconciliation during the prayer around the cross. The cross is brought into the centre of the church, where the brothers normally sit, and they move forwards and turn their prayer stools around to face it. I believe they do remain to pray with the pilgrims although this has not been confirmed to me. The pilgrims move up from the bottom end of the centre. The Friday prayer around the cross usually draws out in time and becomes a late prayer.

The following Saturday evening prayer is a prayer with lights. Small candlelights are placed just outside the churchroom along with sheetnotes and songbooks. At some point early on in the prayer, someone (in the community this is often children) will start lighting the candles at the front of the churchroom. Then people continue lighting each others candles until every candle is lit, and the churchroom is filled with a warm light. As mentioned earlier, the Taizé welcoming sheet states that this is to celebrate the light of the risen Christ. However, when this was spoken of it was said to have a slightly different meaning. The Saturday between Good Friday and Easter Sunday is the darkest day in Christianity. Whereas Christ’s death is marked on Friday, Saturday is the day where nothing really happens. It is the day where all hope is out, where the disciples of Christ woke up to find that their Saviour is truly dead. For Christians today it marks the day of the painful waiting for the Resurrection, the day of death. It bears resemblance to



liminality in that death has incurred and life has not yet been brought back, it is the in-between state of nothingness. And on this darkest of days the Christians light candles to symbolise hope. That even within the darkest night, there is still light. This is also expressed in the songs that are repeated as a mantra:

*“Within our darkest night, you kindle the fire  
that never dies away, that never dies away” (Songs from Taizé 2010:1)*

Sunday is the day of the mass and the celebration of the resurrection. The Eucharist is celebrated every morning, but on Sundays there is a special service, and in the community, I found that Sundays filled up the Church of Reconciliation more than any other day. As the resurrection is celebrated it also reenacts the potency of Christs’ passage through death to life. It is this power that those present at the Eucharist partake in, and it also allows them to take part in that new life. Within these three days, Friday – Saturday – Sunday, the whole origin of Christianity is reenacted and brought to life in the Taizé prayers.

### **3.6 A state of liminality**

It is now time to look further into the theories of liminality that were mentioned previously. Liminality is very relevant for Taizé, as liminality is part of a religious experience for visitors, volunteers, and brothers alike, and there is much symbolism that refers to the state of liminality. Van Gennep defined the rites of passage as “rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age” (Turner 1995:94). All rites of passage are marked by three phases; the separation, or detachment of the individual or group from an earlier position; the margin or liminality; and the aggregation, where the passage is consummated (Turner 1995:94-95). The second phase, the condition of liminality, is of special interest here as it “has few or none of the

attributes of the past or coming state” (ibid:94). It is an in-between state, detached from both past and present. According to Turner, the condition of liminality or liminal person

“slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon” (Turner 1995:95).

Symbols of liminality may be found in clothing as well as behaviour. As liminal entities are in a state of no position, they are also in a state of no possession. Liminal groups are dressed the same since clothing may represent a rank or a role, particularly in the western world. Liminal groups are often dressed simply, they may even be naked, or they can be dressed up as monsters (ibid). The behaviour of liminal groups “is normally passive or humble; they must obey their instructors implicitly, and accept arbitrary punishment without complaint” (ibid). A group of liminal entities will be uniformed or homogenised, - they are all equal and powerless. Turner refers to liminal groups in society as *communitas*, and they represent an opposition to the structure.

“It is as though there are [...] two major ‘models’ for human interrelatedness, juxtaposed and alternating. The first is of society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions [...]. The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders” (ibid:96).

Some of the properties of liminality that Turner discusses are uniformity or homogeneity, equality or same-level status, anonymity, absence of property, sexual abstinence, humility, disregard for personal appearance, unselfishness, suspension of kinship, to name the most relevant to this thesis (ibid:111). Many of these properties describe very well the community life that is seen in Taizé on several levels; the brotherhood, the volunteers, and the visitors.

One of the modalities of *communitas* is monasticism. There is certainly a uniformity within monastic life in the robes that monks often wear, which symbolises poverty and

creates anonymity or disregard for personal appearance. There is a disregard for ownership like property, another expression of poverty. Furthermore, monks live in celibacy. Unselfishness or same-level status are seen in the brothers' work for the poor, and in their suspension of kinship. The men that enter into monasticism are rearranged into a new family of a brotherhood where everyone is equal. Now all of this takes on different expressions within different communities. For the purpose of this thesis I will discuss the community of Taizé as a community in liminality.

There is no rule about changing names upon entering the brotherhood. Even so, there are some brothers that have changed their names as they have become part of the brotherhood. The brothers are only referred to by brother and then their first name, and second names or family names are normally not used. In any case, they are brother so-and-so of Taizé. There is a stripping of previous identity in this; the identity of the brother changes upon entering the brotherhood. He is no longer identified by his family name or title, he is now only a brother. Being a brother also means being ranked as equal to everyone in the brotherhood, except perhaps the Prior. No brother is above another and humility is the general rule. Even with the visitors, who often look upon the brothers with great respect, the brothers remain utterly humble. The brothers do not own property, and if anything is inherited it is given to the community as a whole or dedicated to charity. Furthermore there is uniformity in how the brothers dress. In Taizé, the brothers wear white robes only during prayer, at other times they are dressed normally. I pried further into this while I was in Taizé, because it seemed to me that there was a dress-code for the brothers since they were all quite similarly dressed. Santos writes that "there's a joke among the visitors that all the brothers dress the same: socks and sandals, chinos and a button-down oxford shirt. If the weather is colder, they'll wear a fitted sweater over the shirt" (Santos 2008:87). I asked br. Stephen about this, and he spoke to me about how he viewed the clothing:

"And there's something rather nice, that I can have been working in the kitchen with stained clothes. And you put this white robe on and you say; ok this is a different time now, this is not the time that I'm gonna worry about cooking lunch or mending the cars. I think also with so many people here in the summer months, we need this kind of football kit too, yeah, to see ourselves, who we are, and also that the visitors see that."  
"But there's a dressing code among the brothers, apart from that as well?"

“Pfff. Not really. I mean we...simple...ish. Not too many Dolce & Gabbana, Armanis...”  
“...but no hoodies?”  
“Aye, you would get some hoodies. We try to avoid the t-shirts with advertising on and this kind of stuff. But that’s a kind of monastic simplicity, or also I mean the shakers or the Quakers in the United States are kind of fairly sober, pastel, earth colours” (br. Stephen).

The white robe functions as both an identity mark and it brings about a different mindset. The disregard for brands can be seen in connection with the brothers compassion for those who have less. Brands are status symbols in many parts of the world, and the brothers choose not to partake in that. It may be that the dressing code is not so literal amongst the brothers, but their code of simplicity is noticeable for many visitors. It is noticeable by the fact that they don’t stand out, there are no dreadlocks or funky hairstyles, nothing that can link them to a status or a role in society. They dress simply and typical European, I dare say that they are almost invisible by the way they dress. At the least, they are quite anonymous in a crowd. The prayer is a contrast to this, because this is the only time that the brother’s dressing will stand out from the rest of the crowd. This brother spoke of the white robes as a kind of football kit, like a team shirt, and the purpose for it, is to unify the brothers and also make them visible for the visitors. Still, the uniformity in this hides the individual identity, the identity is rather defined by the group.

As liminality is both likened to death and to being in the womb, it is likely to refer to both the major Christian yearly feasts as passages of liminality. Easter bears the most characteristics of liminality as it symbolises a journey from death to life. Palm Sunday begins with the knowledge that death is soon to occur. After the death of Christ on Good Friday, there is a passage through death and back to life, and the time in between is marked as a waiting time; it is a journey. The icon of resurrection in Taizé shows how Christ descends into the land of the dead, it is the stage of liminality that is depicted in this image<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> The biblical background for Christs’ descent into the land of the dead is found in 1.Peter 3:19-22.

### **3.7 Liminality and Pilgrimage: To be in between**

Kubicki has already identified the visit to Taizé as a pilgrimage process, when she uses Turner's notion of social drama as "a useful framework for interpreting the pilgrimage week and what is enacted at Taizé" (Kubicki 1999:134). It has been discussed how the monastic life can be interpreted as a life on a continuous liminal stage, but the liminal stage can be experienced for all visitors to Taizé.

#### **Status, roles and politico-legal-economic positions**

People from all over the world come and visit Taizé communauté, I myself witnessed visitors from several continents while I was there during one of the most quiet weeks of the year. It is a major challenge for the brothers, as people come from very different backgrounds and obviously very different economic positions. Upon arriving in Taizé in France, visitors pay for their stay on a sliding scale. Thus the price differs, most notably, between the countries of origin, or one could also argue that it differs between economic positions. People from northern Europe and the US are charged at a higher rate than people from 'third-world' countries. This is according to the principle of sharing. Santos informs us further that "they also adjust your contribution based on how long you are staying and whether or not you are sleeping in their dormitories or if you brought your own tent or camper. If you're a young person (under thirty years old), your costs are considerably less as well" (Santos 2008:25). In addition, there is no fixed price as such, but a minimum and a maximum, meaning that visitors can contribute more towards the stay of others by giving more than they have to. Already at this point, people are levelled out, it is an equaliser for the visitors. If they have more, they give more; it is both optional and a rule. If they have less, they give less or none at all. And having more money does not bring many advantages with it. In Taizé communauté, you cannot buy a finer meal. Compared to a normal holiday, there are some major differences. First of all, with more money, one can pay for a high standard hotel, while for less money, there are rather backpackers and hostels. A meal usually comes according to cost as well, a three-course dinner with red wine costs more than a sandwich. And paying customers are not usually asked to clean their own tables or rooms. Different economic positions create

different social positions, and in the world people are rated according to their economic status. In Taizé, visitors are stripped of their socio-economic position for the length of their visit, they are equalised. Certainly there are differences in clothing and equipment, but the way of life in Taizé prevents the differences from reaching the level they are at in society elsewhere.

People's roles in society are mostly connected to their work, but in daily life most people function in several roles all at once. Family roles, customer relationships, and different working positions contribute to a continuous play of power and inequality. In Taizé, people serve each other. There is no one person that works for money in the community; the brothers live from the sale of their pottery, and "staff" in the non-profit shop and in the welcoming areas, are volunteers that stay for a longer period. Furthermore all visitors (that are able to) have to contribute to the work in the community by cleaning toilets, cooking, doing dishes, emptying garbage, clearing outdoor areas and so on. Having a high degree or an important job elsewhere does not mean that the visitor gets any different tasks from the rest.

The volunteers in the Taizé-community are an interesting group. Some of the young men that come and stay aspire to be one of the brothers, and some of the young women ponder such questions as well. Others again just want to spend some time in a monastery. When I was in Taizé in France myself, I was uncertain as of what to write about the volunteers. I met some volunteers that I had really good conversations with, sharing views on theology and life-experiences, and I met others who seemed rather annoyed at me, or bossy even. Some were "cliquey", - only talking to the other volunteers, and some mingled more with the visitors. The volunteers are an important part of everyday business in Taizé communauté, it even seems like they are the ones running the place at times. I was intrigued to see that Santos has described what is also my experience with the volunteers: "The social dynamic that surrounds the permanents [volunteers] is an interesting one. Sometimes they're among the friendliest people in the community, other times some of them act as if your presence in the community bothers them" (Santos 2008:94). Santos

offers two explanations to this. Firstly, “the attitudes of the permanents change the longer they are in the community” (ibid 95). In the beginning everything is a thrill and

“they’re excited to meet new people and learn how the community functions, and their new role connects them to the community in a different way, which makes them feel special [...]. The permanents who stay longer than a month, however, experience the end of this honeymoon phase. The work at Taizé is hard and demanding on the volunteers, and eventually it takes its toll” (ibid.).

There is a limit to how many new friendships one can see come and go, and staying in the community means meeting endless new people. Such brief friendships, that have no real opportunity to last is draining; in the end many will become blunted. It is difficult to cope with an ever-changing network, where one always gives and does not receive anything lasting in the end. The other explanation that Santos offers, “centers on the permanents’ longing to feel special or unique in the community” (ibid:96). They change position from visitor to permanent, but their new position does not give them any real advantages.

Santos quotes one brother saying that “anything which is exclusive – that we are special – is contrary to the spirit of Taizé. Even though people want to feel a bit more like “I belong more than the people who are here for a week,” we don’t want that really” (ibid.) Their status does not really change. The volunteers that I spoke to, told me that they did not even know what their work for the week was going to be. They might know it two weeks at a time, but normally their job in the community is allocated weekly. This means that they cannot prepare for their job, and they cannot plan for long periods at a time. The brothers spoke of this as living in the now. It also means that they have no real position; there is no chef, or welcome speaker, all these jobs are randomly rotated.

If ritual liminality is a passing phase, the person in liminality becomes reallocated in society, with a new status and a new role. What can be seen in Taizé however, is that the one-week stay offers qualities of liminality, and thus for many people it is experienced as a pilgrimage. There is a major difference between this and ritual liminality however, as there is no aggregation. There is no real *transition*, liminality becomes a permanent state. This is likened to pilgrimage, a journey where the main goal is not arriving, but being on the road. When I posed my theories of liminality to br. Stephen, he answered me that “Pilgrimage is maybe what you’re talking about also, it’s this in-between stage, you don’t

have any fixed role, you just have to get from this place to the next place as best you can.” The main point in a pilgrimage process is being on the road.

“On the road, yeah. [...] But that’s maybe why pilgrimage is interesting too, because there is the aspect of you doing it on your own, but also on the road you meet other pilgrims, and those meetings in fact, can be quite important, or... I mean there are conversations which happen which are important” (br. Stephen).

This may explain some of the frustration seen in the volunteers; unless joining the brotherhood, there is no real transition, there is no opportunity to climb the system, they are caught in-between.

As discussed above, liminality is frequently likened to darkness, and there is a light and darkness symbolism in the pilgrimage. A pilgrimage is a journey of waiting, and it is also a journey of darkness, of searching perhaps for an inner destination, a state of mind, rather than a physical destination. Much of this motif can be seen in Taizé-songs.

*“By night, we hasten, in darkness, to search for living water,  
only our thirst leads us onward, only our thirst leads us onwards” (Songs from Taizé  
2010:12)*

*“Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.  
Wait for the Lord: keep watch, take heart!” (ibid.:2)*

The interesting thing about the lyrics in these songs, is that there is again no transition. The journey remains in darkness, and the search goes without finding. Where one could expect a search in the darkness in the past, that now the light of Jesus is found, the search and the journey in this song remains in the present. The destination is not yet reached, and the song does not offer any solutions nor a road to light. As such, the motif is here the pilgrimage process; where it is not the end that is the goal, but the road and the journey itself. Life for the Christian is often expressed as a trial, where in death one finds



the final union with Christ. The apostle Paul<sup>24</sup> expresses that “For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain [...]. I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far, but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body” (Phil 1:21, 23). In the same letter he expresses the goal for the Christian further: “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil 3:20). In this sense, the Christian never truly belongs in the world, or in this reality as Eliade would say, but he belongs to a complete other dimension. The apostle Paul also calls the Christians “foreigners and exiles” (1.Pet 2:11), adding further to the notion that the Christian is a traveller, and that life itself is a pilgrimage. Christians are backpackers; only passing through.

What is discussed above is that life in general is for Christians often referred to as a journey. However, I doubt that this is experienced at all times, it is rather a motif that is used to describe the Christians’ longing for a different reality, it is a restlessness that differs in intensity through life. Life in Taizé, by creating liminality for visitors, intensifies the feeling of passing through, it creates a period of time where the journey and the longing comes into focus. Furthermore, as visitors is normally welcomed from Sunday to Sunday, the week culminates in the “three days of Easter” at the weekend. The week allows for a few days to settle in the community, before the state of liminality is made complete in the regeneration of the Passion of Christ. On Sunday, Christ is risen, and through the Eucharist, His new life is passed on to the visitors, they are again brought back to life. The Eucharist recreates life, it saturates the visitor with power; the eternal life of Christ.

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<sup>24</sup> The apostle Paul is in Christian tradition assumed to be the author of most of the letters in the New Testament.

## 4. AGENCY AND POWER

When speaking of religion and rituals on an academic level, the aspect of power is one that cannot be ignored. There will be some structure of power, either very tangible or completely hidden. As such, the homogeneity and equality of *communitas* is a limited construction. Turner describes *communitas* as a “communion of equal individuals who *submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders*” (Turner 1995:96, my emphasis). Studying Taizé in light of ritualistic power is an interesting exercise. Although hierarchical structures can be identified within Taizé prayers and community, the hierarchical range of power is limited by the individual choices that are practised both within prayers and community life. As we recall the brothers more than anything just facilitate for people that choose to come for any reason. The variety of ritual and ritual control differs according to the society studies, as Bell (1992:176) states; “not every society or subgroup appeals to ritual activities in the same way and to the same degree. Hence, any theory of ritual as social control must also specify what type of society or community is likely to depend heavily on this form of control and why”. What I will address in this chapter how Taizé relates to issues of power and dominance, an amplification of the introductory question of; whose intention is behind? For the quest of identifying and placing how Taizé relates to issues of power and dominance, the most important data is that of empirical studies. Only through observation and interviews can the observer find the effects of that which is expressed literally, verbally, or symbolically, such as in ritual studies. For the discussion then, this chapter will start with ritual theory, moving on to discuss subjectivity and culture, then recounting and discussing the individual points of view. What I have found in my studies, is that Taizé opens up for individual choices and at the same time places the individual firmly within its community, and the combination of these two is the real thrust to Taizés’ relevance in the world today.

## 4.1 Taizé rituals; habitus or performance?

To attend a Taizé happening is to live in community for a limited time, and community life is largely defined by their rituals of prayer. In addition to that, there exist norms of behaviour in community life that relates to ritual. To begin the discussion it is worthwhile to look at the actual definition of ritual. I believe most people think of ritual as an action or set of actions with a symbolic meaning. But there is also other behaviour that relates to ritual. Bell (1992:69) states that “definitions of ritual must go on to suggest, explicitly or implicitly, the nature and relation of nonritual activity and various degrees of nearly-but-not-quite-ritual behavior”. I find this definition useful in discussing Taizé, as ritual behaviour extends beyond the limits of the prayers and onto daily life practises within a Taizé happening. For this purpose, Bourdieu’s *habitus* is a useful theory as it involves a network of dispositions that the individual acts within. “The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment [...] produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures, predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations [...]” (Bourdieu 1977:72). The habitus is thus a system of dispositions and of expectations. Bourdieu takes a step up from treating practise as a mechanical reaction, and argues further that the individual acts within the habitus, but only quasi-consciously, with “an estimation of chances which assumes the transformation of the past effect into the expected objective” (ibid. 76). However, the quasi-conscious responses are “defined first in relation to a system of objective potentialities” (ibid.), a set of actions and expected outcomes to those actions. Bourdieu’s *habitus* does not render much to the individual acting outwith and against the system of dispositions, in my point of view leaving the individual very limited. The existentially complex subject that Ortner debates is quite a distance from the conditional freedom of Bourdieu’s individual.

“At the individual level I will assume, with Giddens, that actors are always at least partially ‘knowing subjects’, that they have some degree of reflexivity about themselves and their desires, and that they have some ‘penetration’ into the ways in which they are formed by their circumstances. They are, in short, conscious in the conventional psychological sense, something that needs to be emphasized as a complement to, though not a replacement of, Bourdieu’s insistence on the inaccessibility to actors of the underlying logic of their practises” (Ortner 2006:111).

With these theories as a background, Taizé is a deeply interesting subject to explore, as it is multicultural and international in nature. The habitus, I suggest, is more like a web of cultures struggling to coexist, and is never a fixed system, but more like a living organism that adapts to its surroundings. Whether the individuals have access to the underlying logic of their practices is will be on a sliding scale, depending on how much knowledge and understanding each individual will have about the rituals and the ethos that guides life at Taizé.

The importance of ritual for the individual and the community is explained through Geertz statement that “In ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turns out to be the same world” (Geertz, in Bell 1992:27). The true dimensions of ritual comes clearer into focus if this quote is seen in connection with Eliades’ (1987) work. The world as imagined can also be understood as the world as believed, or the *really real* world for the Christian. In this sense, ritual fuses the dimensions of the human world and the realm of the divine. Furthermore, Geertz makes a distinction between ethos and worldview, where “ethos designates the moral and aesthetic aspects of a culture”, or people’s underlying attitude toward themselves and the society (Bell 1992:26). Ethos is also described as dispositions, further differentiated into moods and motivations, whereas worldview indicates the “cognitive, existential aspects” of a culture, a people’s sense of the really real, their most comprehensive idea of a general order of existence” (ibid.). Geertz thus adds another dimension to the habitus, seeing how it is not only ethical dispositions or expectations that defines people’s actions, but also their worldview.

When trying to define the ethos or dispositions within Taizé it is important to look at the expressed values and visions; peace, compassion, joy, simplicity, sharing, etc., and studying how they relate to a Christian worldview. Santos says about the brothers that “Through their life together, they have aimed at unapologetically incarnating the gospel; their story is marked by their care for the poor and love for their neighbor. Focusing on the gospel’s essence has enabled them to speak into the lives of millions of young people over the years” (2008:54). The Christian worldview defines the *really real* for these

brothers, and thus the Gospel is one of the main things that determines the ethos developed within the community. Bell (1992) identifies a dichotomy between thought and action, in which, simply put, the action is what is actually and physically being done, and the thought is the meaning behind the action, or ethos ascribes to action as worldview to thought. In ritual, ethos and worldview are fused and synthesised, or as Bell quotes “cultural performances such as religious ritual are ‘not only the point at which the dispositional and conceptual aspects of religious life converge *for the believer*, but also the point at which the interaction between them can be most readily examined *by the detached observer*’” (ibid:27). Meaning is in ritual a fusion of thought and action, and “thus, a cultural focus on ritual activity renders the rite a veritable window on the most important processes of cultural life” (ibid.). The prayer of Taizé is a window to their worldview and ethos.

In ethnomusicology and ritual, the theory of performance has an important role. I have been pondering how to discuss performance theory as the rituals of Taizé seem to be quite a distance from those discussed in Laderman and Roseman (1995). As I have explained above, Taizé liturgy does not have any speakers other than those reading Scriptures, they have no worship band in front, and there is no pulpit as a focal point. If Taizé’s prayers are to be discussed as a performance, it is thus more appropriate to discuss the individuals and how they respond to the expectations in prayer. What I found interesting in my interviews was that the informants seemed to use the prayers to enter into a meditative state of mind, and that they expected to be able to enter into that state of mind quite like a performance, something that they needed for the prayer to be successful: “[...] I may get annoyed with myself, if I haven’t managed to...well, to forget things around me. Then I can think about why I won’t, and why did I not manage it this time, is there really that much that I should sit and think about? And usually it isn’t” (Personal interview 1). That state of mind was something he wished to do and to achieve, but it was not necessary to enter it every time for him for the prayers to be successful “but that’s maybe because it does happen often, that I feel I get into...manage to forget everything around me” (ibid.). The discourse that is used when talking about achieving that state of mind, is similar to that of performance; that it was something he intended to

do. But failing to achieve it, was not experienced as a failure of prayer altogether. He rather described it as an annoyance. “I feel it’s more of an annoyance, if I can’t put things away then and there, and just be with God” (ibid.). It is clear that to enter into an inner silence is what he wanted and expected for the prayer. The second informant has a musical background. Her intention was also to enter into a meditative state of mind, but at times she felt she got distracted by her own performance: “Sometimes I get too conscious of the song, and that I sort of; ‘can I manage it? Does it sound good?’ At other times you just enter into the meditative, you just sing and sing and you don’t think” (Personal interview 2). Silence was more a time for personal reflection, although she seems to believe that entering into meditation was the expected thing to do.

“But when you have the silence [the 8 mins of silence]... I don’t manage to have that silence where you just disappear. I have never been able to do that meditation-thing, when you’re kinda not conscious, that you manage to get into the body and just breathe. I’m bombarded with thoughts, and I spend the silence both with thoughts and that, inside of me” (Personal interview 2)

It seems like the state of inner peace, or silence-meditation is a goal for these informants, that they wish to achieve that state of mind within the prayer. Achieving it is a good performance. Both these informants spoke further about the conscious performance of the songs, that they felt disturbed by not being able to sing well at times. But being conscious of anything that they needed to do was a disturbance, thus I find that the real motivation was to be able to achieve a meditative state of mind. The 8 to 10 minutes of silence in the liturgy is a trying point for many, the difficult point to get by.

The third informant spoke of the times of prayer in a slightly different manner, as he has a very different background from the others: “[...] Maybe it’s not even what happens at the prayer times every day, but that they happen three times a day. That [...] you stop three times a day, and you reset through yourself” (Personal interview 3). He called this practise “centring down” and explained the idea behind it:

“[...] So, we believe in this idea, that of Christ in everyone, that Christ lives in all of us in some sense. And so what we do when we centre down is that we let all the noise, and the distractions from the rest of daily life sort of fade away and drop away, and centre down to the core of Christ that is in us, what in Quaker-talk we would call the inner light.

This sounds quite similar to what br. Stephen spoke about, the idea of the breath of God in every person. The intention is an awareness of such through the prayer. The experience of “centring down” seems to be quite similar to the accounts above, in that the goal is to achieve an inner silence, letting the noise and the distractions from daily life fade away. Furthermore, the music contributed to focusing on Christian ethos.

“So I think to set aside three times a day, when you come and centre down, where you use these songs to direct your thoughts towards values of Christian expression, and then you take these times of silence, where you can really just focus and think and sit, and centre...that this has real value. That it gives a sort of plumb-line to your day almost, like a reaction to your day that brings everything into connection around it. So I think that the prayertimes for me are times of centring, where everything else can sort of come into focus” (Personal interview 3).

The prayers, or these times of inner silence, are like the state of liminality; they reinstate the core values of the individual, they bring him or her back to the *reality*, and saturate daily life with meaning and power. But they are also difficult to achieve and they have qualities quite like those of performance; it is an individual, inner performance of reaching a desired state of mind. The success brings meaning and power into life, and not achieving it is clearly a lack; it means that they are too distracted with issues in daily life. It is clear that these informants enter into the prayer with both expectations and that they have a personal goal.

There are two things that stand out about Taizé rituals; one is that the prayers are deeply individual and subjective in nature; secondly the nearly-but-not-quite-ritual-behaviour, that is the community life that every visitor is drawn into, places the individual in conjunction with a larger fellowship. But the motivation for the prayers is subjective. The decoration in the church strengthens a theory of individuality; the symbolism is open. The Eucharist is voluntary, and a Protestant Eucharist is served alongside the Catholic Eucharist and blessed bread for those who for any reason will not take the Eucharist. Everyone is offered something, and no one is told what to take. This community succeeds in that they invite the individual to be the centre of their religious life, and at the very same time creates a social network that fulfils the individual’s need for a close fellowship.

## 4.2 The subject and its culture

In anthropology there is an ongoing debate about the role of the subject versus the role of culture. Ortner (2006:112) identifies two dimensions to Geertz's theory of culture; the classic American concept of culture as the worldview and ethos of a particular group of people; and a philosophical and literary theory of the cultural process, emphasising the construction of meaning, and of subjectivities, through the symbolic processes embedded in the social world. The first concept of culture is problematic in several ways, first of all "the culture concept is too undifferentiated, too homogeneous" (ibid.), and does not include the social differences within a given society. The second critique which I will focus on here, is that such a notion of culture is too closely linked with essentialism, "the idea that 'the Nuer' or 'the Balinese' had some single essence which made them the way they were, and which, moreover, explained much of what they did and how they did it" (ibid.). This classification of peoples is far too general. The American concept of culture has a "potential for essentializing and demonizing whole groups of people" (ibid. 113). That problem can be seen in the media's representation of immigrant groups, a journalistic habit that leads to stigmatisation and segregation in particular for large, diverse groups such as Somalis, Pakistanis and Muslims. Taizé overcomes such issues in their community life, the nearly-but-not-quite-ritual behaviour. People that visit are from vastly different cultures and they are expected to share prayers and discussions, and cooperate in daily chores. Cooperating and living with people from different cultures, would help individuals to overcome prejudice. If we were to analyse Taizé as a culture then, it is a multitude of cultures, interrelated and interacting, participating in communal life and prayers.

People that come to Taizé do have some things in common. Ortner states that, "one can recognize a cultural formation as a relatively coherent body of symbols and meanings, ethos and worldview, and at the same time understand those meanings as ideological, and/or as part of the forces and processes of domination" (ibid.). A *relatively* coherent body opens up for a discernment in references; the term creates an opportunity for individually constructed meanings. On the practical side then, Taizé can be loosely



constructed as a group of individuals who share a significant amount of practices, such as prayer and communal life, worldview and ethos. Whereas some of the practices can be pinned down to the rituals of prayer and shared meals – common for all participants, the individual interpretation of ritual can be quite diverse, although some rituals will have a norm to their interpretation, such as the Eucharist. Another side to the practices is the ethos and worldview that determine daily life, such as simplicity and sharing. The second concept of culture, that of a dynamic process, emphasising the *construction* of meaning and of subjectivities, is thus more fertile for the discussion of Taizé.

### **The construction of subjectivity**

There are two interrelated aspects of subjectivity. As Ortner defines it: “By subjectivity I mean the ensemble of modes of perception, affect, thought, desire, and fear that animate acting subjects. But I *always mean as well* the cultural and social formations that shape, organize, and provoke those modes of affect, thought, and so on” (Ortner 2006:107, my emphasis). Ortner readily describes the subject as an acting force within a society, and thus rebukes “Bourdieu’s insistence on the deeply internalized and largely unconscious nature of social knowledge in acting subjects” (2006:110). Ortner offers a theory to fill in the gap where human behaviour fails to reproduce the existing social patterns, following up on Giddens emphasis of subjects as “always at least partially ‘knowing’, and thus able to act on and sometimes against the structures that made them” (Ortner 2006:110).

Ortner’s emphasis in her work is to restore the question of subjectivity to social theory, arguing its importance in the human sciences: “In part it is important because it is a major dimension of human existence, and to ignore it theoretically is to impoverish the sense of the human in the so-called human sciences” (ibid.). The political importance of subjectivity is the basis of her theory of agency; “a necessary part of understanding how people (try to) act on the world even as they are acted upon. Agency is not some natural or originary will; it takes shape as specific desires and intentions within a matrix of subjectivity – of (culturally constituted) feelings, thoughts, and meanings” (ibid.). Ortner’s definition of subjectivity means a “specifically cultural and historical consciousness”, where the actors are knowing subjects that have some degree of

reflexivity about themselves and their desires, wary of the ways in which they are formed by their circumstances (ibid.111). The studies of dominated groups shows that there is “an exploration of how the condition of subjection is subjectively constructed and experienced, as well as the creative ways in which it is – if only episodically – overcome” (ibid.).

### 4.3 An individual choice

As I have given a fair amount of attention to the individual accounts in this thesis, it is fair to say that I share Ortners’ idea of subjectivity, and that I also aim to explore it in the individuals that I have interviewed. In any case, all the individuals that I have interviewed are non-native to Taizé, coming from different countries and variously different cultures. One could argue that the *habitus* of our generation involves that of travelling and globalisation, that there is an expectation in society to interacting with other cultures and accepting differences, of cooperating despite disagreements. Furthermore, one could argue that the ethos of Taizé is one of acceptance of differences. As I wanted to investigate the reasons for choosing Taizé for the informants (not including the brothers), I asked them about their religious or non-religious background. All these informants have travelled to Taizé from Norway, U.S. or Russia, thus excluding the possibilities of them being there out of pure chance. It is a very conscious choice to come to the Taizé community. One of my informants was non-religious when she started attending the Taizé meetings, another came from a Pentacostal background, the third from a Quaker background, and the fourth from an Orthodox background. One of my informants specifically told me that he aimed to reach out of the culture that he was a part of.

“What I felt about worship, was more about a search to experience a special presence of God through worship, and I sought it much because I wanted that experience of presence with God. It’s a few years ago now, and at that time I thought about it a lot, and I consciously left Philadelphia<sup>25</sup> and started attending the state church<sup>26</sup> in stead, to

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<sup>25</sup> Philadelphia is a Pentacostal church in Oslo.

<sup>26</sup> The state church in Norway is quite conservative in liturgy etc, compared to Pentacostal churches.

communicate with God in a different way that only worship with raised hands, which is common in Pentacostal churches. And I can feel that it's...it is incredibly good to feel that you have a connection with Him in different ways" (Personal interview 1).

For him, there is a different motivation to participating in Taizé than achieving the state of mind that he found through Pentacostal worship. He was also aware of the influence of both other people and the situation. "It's no rush for...what should I say, a state of mind, or a special kind of God's presence. Because I do feel that is human-made, that atmosphere, and that the type of worship and the room has such influence on you [...]." (Personal interview 1). There is quite an active choice behind this search, as this informant actually left the church that he was a part of and started searching for personal experiences in a different place. The motivation in this case is both subjective and personal.

The third informant grew up in a Christian family and was accustomed to church every week. "In fact, I like to joke that I actually grew up in the church, - literally, because I lived two blocks away from the church that I went to" (Personal interview 3). His background involved him spending lots of time at church, something he recalls as positive.

"So I would spend a lot of time there, even as a child, helping out with, helping sharpening pencils in the office, or do just random things. So it was a place to go, after school, or just to hang out some [...]. So, I was very involved and I loved it, and it was very good for me, all the way through. I stayed there all the way through college" (ibid.).

He ended up working as a youth pastor in a different church from the one he grew up in. And it was at that time that he had what in Christian discourse is often called a "crisis of faith". For him it came through questioning God's will with his life. He explains this experience as a process, which was quite difficult as one of his duties as a youth pastor is teaching others what he at the time doubted:

"And it doesn't seem like, well I can't seem to figure out Gods will, and it doesn't seem like it should be that, honestly, hard to figure out. If he loves me, then He'd want to communicate it with me, and I should be able to find it out, and shouldn't be that mystery of... like a maze, that I have to, you know, press the right buttons and turn the right directions or something. So, I started questioning, sort of, what, does God even have a will, and if God doesn't have a will, does God exist. You sort of follow this trail pretty quick, it goes downhill pretty fast. So, yeah, thats where I was at for a while, showing up and teaching something that I was, well that I hoped was true, but I didn't really know anymore. And just really asking some questions to the point where I think, like, I needed

to figure out something soon, because I wouldn't want to be the hypocritical. I wouldn't stay teaching something that I didn't believe in, it's not helpful for anyone, or worthwhile" (Personal interview 3).

It is not uncommon for Christians to experience a process like this. Very often these crisis start with such questions as above; 'that if God exists, why is it so hard to figure out His will, and why does He not talk to me?' I am not going into the discussion of how doubt comes about in Christian lives, but merely pointing out that it does come about, even for someone who has literally "grown up in Church". If an individual has grown up within any environment and is surrounded by that environment, as with both these informants, then to break out of it and start questioning the basis of it speaks for a subjective motivation.

The fourth informant had a similar account of starting a spiritual search that was subjectively motivated. He was from a mixed family that had some Jewish background. His grandmother was a devoted Jewish. But as he grew up in the Soviet Union, "people didn't care much about religion" (personal interview 4). He recounted that he went to church on a regular basis (once every month/two months), "but not with much devotion" (ibid.). He did however believe in God from quite early on, "but it was not influenced by parents" (ibid.), as none of his parents were devoted religious people. But he said about himself that "I always believed, I always prayed somehow. And then I, you know, life goes on, you just start to look for some answers, for some questions which are inside you [...], like; who am I? What is [the] meaning of the things? [...] So when I was thirty I started to intensively search [...] for these answers" (ibid.). Although he had heard about Taizé earlier, it was a friend of him that eventually persuaded him to come. As he came to his first prayer, he recounts: "We were all together, we were praying, and it was like...I still remember that day as one of the most happiest days of my life" (ibid.). Furthermore, he voiced his concern for a growing nationalism in Moscow, a nationalism that allegedly is popular in a broad range of the population. Being in Taizé helps him to resist this movement: "it helps me to stand, you see in these things. I just remember that whatever convincing, whatever sweet these speeches can be, I have [a] better one, to stand against those. Yes, and just to remember the faces of Taizé, of all colours and

nations, just to say no, no you are lying. It's not true" (ibid.). Being in Taizé apparently prompts a strong individual choice for him.

These stories strengthen the theory of subjectivity, that it is very much an individual motivation that is behind prayer and spiritual search. Even when these individuals have grown up within an environment, they are aware its influence, and able to act from their subjective initiative.

### **Mysticism**

Another aspect of subjectivity is mysticism, - that which is unknown and cannot be completely figured out. Taizé opens up for this perspective as their rituals are quite non-invasive. During prayer there is no sermon, and there is no spoken communication. The prayers with their meditative songs and long periods of silence leave a lot of space for the individual thought. The third informant, as we recall, had a crisis of faith. For him the solution to that problem came through opening up the perspective on God from what he was used to:

"So, it was around this time that I started doing some reading, and came in touch with some authors and some ideas that expanded God significantly, from the way that I had understood him growing up, that added a bit more mystery to the faith [...]. In modernity everything has an answer, everything is scientific, like, and everything comes down to hypothesis that you can prove is true" (Personal interview 3).

There is an arising consciousness in this; the way he understood God as growing up, apparently no longer fitted into his experience. Adding mystery does not mean finding an answer, but it means opening up room for insecurity and accepting that he does not understand God fully:

"So when I started reading these things, I started thinking about these things, I started opening up...maybe God is a bit more mysterious than what I made him out to be, because if I, or any other human being, had all the answers on God, then are we not in some sense God? Like, are we not as powerful as he is? If we know everything, even thought we are finite, He is infinite, then what exactly makes Him worthy of anything? If I can figure out everything about him, then why care what He thinks?" (ibid.)

Adding mystery to the faith expanded his view of God:

"So that really sort of, opened up these huge vistas of faith, of just saying; I don't have answers to a lot of things. And it was really freeing, to not have to have answers all the time. And not in like a; I'm just gonna ignore things or I'm not even gonna ask questions, but instead of saying, like; I'm gonna have questions, and sometimes they're gonna get

sorted out, and sometimes they're probably just gonna stay questions, and that's sort of a realistic view of life perhaps. So that was a huge turning point for me [...]" (ibid.)

Mysticism is characterised by the uncertain, by actually leaving room for questions that he does not expect will be answered. "[...] because when you don't feel like you have the answers, then you have space to ask questions, that before you didn't ask, because, well, you already knew the answer. But then the more questions you ask, the more areas you can explore, so yeah, it definitely opens up lots of new possibilities and potential" (ibid.). Taizé fits into this as their prayers are non-invasive, and they do leave room for individual reflection and personal experiences. However, the subjectivity in this chapter can only be described as a subjectivity *within* a fellowship. As written of in the chapter "A holy place", the informants also recounted the fellowship within Taizé and the universality of the prayers as very strong experiences. The sharing groups create a network for both discussion and sharing on a personal level. It is a strange kind of setting then, that the community works as a frame around the individual's spiritual experiences, and that in Taizé, there is room for both.

#### **4.4 Dominance or cooperation?**

When discussing dominance and the ability to identify dominance, I have found Taizé a strange situation to be in. There are no written codes of conduct, and the guidance for behaviour is very subtle. However, there is certainly a norm as to what is accepted or not, and if a person disturbs community life, that person will be asked to leave. The brothers interact with visitors through work (daily chores), Bible introductions and conversations. Apart from that they live and work separately from the visitors. My experience from the brothers' appearance is that they are very humble. They listen before they talk, and through the conversations I discovered that they did not appear to have any preassumed answers. When asking questions, I was often met by silence at first, and then a well developed reflection on that question. Nonetheless, the brothers undeniably have a position of power within Taizé. Their position of power is one of *communitas*; as an

opposition to the structures of socio-economic-political power seen in society elsewhere. The brothers have an incredible possibility to influence the young people visiting Taizé. Their position is one of spiritual elders, or spiritual wise men, for many of those visiting. The brothers live a life of quite strict control as expressed by their life commitments. They are a community living in a liminal state, as such they are *communitas*. Turner writes about the power of *communitas*:

“*Communitas* breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority. It is almost everywhere held to be sacred or ‘holy’, possibly because it transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency” (Turner 1995:128).

For Turner, the dialectic of structure and anti-structure is what creates equilibrium in society. The brothers are deeply respected by the visitors to the community. Being in that position, they do have the power to influence and guide the young people. Furthermore, Turner writes that “those living in community seem to require, sooner or later, an absolute authority, whether this be a religious commandment, a divinely inspired leader, or a dictator” (ibid.:129). In Taizé, the absolute authority is the Prior of the community. The life commitments include accepting the authority of the Prior: “Will you, so that we may be of one heart and one mind and so that the unity of our common service may be fully achieved, adopt the orientations of the community expressed by the Prior, bearing in mind that he is a poor servant within the community?” (br. Roger 2000:74). Even as this life-commitment is common in monastic societies, I have the impression that it varies how strictly this control is actually practised. Rather than control and dominance, I think respect and cooperation marks this relationship within Taizé. I believe that because of the individual reflections that I was met with when asking questions. The brothers would often refer to the thoughts of the founder of Taizé, but they also had their own opinions to different questions.

As for the visitors, there is no written code of conduct. There are however expectations that one is met with; to participate and to respect others. “I mean, the code of conduct is really respect for the others” br. Stephen answered to this question. However, that can be a challenge with so many different cultures present. Dress code is only one example of

that, - modesty is what is expected in the monastery, but that is defined differently within different cultures. And in the summer months with several thousand people present, there will be different expectations from different cultures. Brother Stephen told me another story which exemplifies some of the challenges that they experience in Taizé:

“Anyways, a few years ago I was here, and there were some young Indonesians here, and they came to me and said; Brother, brother! People are doing erotic dances behind the café, can you go and talk to them please? So I went with fear and trembling, it’s really not my favourite job. And I went behind our non-profit café, and it was Scottish people, doing traditional Scottish dances!”

“Ceilidh<sup>27</sup>?”

“Yes. But for Indonesians, that a man should have his hand on the waist of a woman who is not his wife, was shocking, completely shocking. So anyways, I said to the Indonesians; no sorry, it’s ok, this is very old tradition, you know, four to five hundred years they’ve been doing this. So they kind of accepted my explanation. Anyway they went back to Indonesia, and they sent me a postcard of a dance on the beach, where people were wearing like, pretty much zero clothes, and I was thinking; hm, so they don’t have their hands on the shoulders of, or the waists of the women, but if you did this in Europe, you would be...yeah”.

As there are so many different cultures present, there are very different expressions of modesty and respect. The challenge is to respect other people, even if their practises are not understood, and to be aware that some things are difficult to accept for others.

“I mean, the other example would be, we have the Bible readings printed on sheets; people put them on the floor; people stand on them by accident. And again, for people from Islamic countries, to stand on the word of God is...outrageous. We would just say; ‘Oh, I’m sorry’.[...] That’s the challenge of living in Taizé too” (br. Stephen).

The brothers aim to raise that awareness of others, to find a common way of behaviour without unduly restricting people. That means finding a middle way to a lot of issues:

“And even our non-profit café is another good example. We sell alcohol and cigarettes, which for some people...”

“...in Norway that’s unheard of.”

“Yeah, but if we didn’t, the people who need cigarettes or alcohol, they would go to the local supermarket and they would buy it in big quantities. So our kind of ploy, was; ok, you can buy it here, you can consume it here, but you don’t take five-liter bottles of wine into the camping area. But again, it’s a kind of respect, and it’s a kind of...”

“It’s finding that middle way.”

“Yeah, exactly.”

It is interesting to see the lack of control that the brothers wish to exercise. As br. Stephen expressed to me, the code of conduct is really that of respect to others, which would in

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<sup>27</sup> A ceilidh is a traditional Scottish dance.



this case be a variable, as different cultures have different codes of behaviour. There are many challenges in a multicultural community, and the way the brothers tackle it is not by forcing *their* cultural codes on the visitors, but rather by inviting people to understand and respect one another.

## **5. SUMMARISING DISCUSSION**

In this project I have looked at the relationship between music and religion with one particular case study; the Taizé community. I have studied how the individual experience the worship ritual, and what effects the surroundings have on that experience. I have questioned the role of community and the individual in the Taizé arrangements. I have analysed religious phenomenology in both the personal experiences and the prayer ritual.

In connecting with something larger than self, I assumed that this meant connecting with God in a supernatural way. I would not have suspected how the feeling of connecting with a multicultural group would have that strong and lasting impact on the individuals that I have been in touch with. That simply meeting and praying with a multitude of people from different cultures and backgrounds could be viewed as a holy experience was out of the question when I started investigating. Taizé meets a need for community in an individualised world, - not just in the sharing of prayer and life, but also in that they expect the young people to participate in all aspects of community, such as work, food-distribution, and dishes. The intrinsic feeling of self-worth comes from that of being connected to the community; both the local community and that of a universal church.

In the meetings between segregated groups, such as Croatians and Serbians, Christians and Muslims, and even perhaps Christians and secular people, the groups have had to cooperate for the common good of a superior cause, for the common good of the community and the church. Thus people are able to overcome individual mistrust and anger by focusing on the things they have in common. The community constricts the individual, and through that the individual cooperates and accepts difficulties, it experiences personal growth in overcoming pre-assumed hindrances. As there are certainly hierarchies within Taizé, the relationship between brothers, volunteers, and pilgrims are perhaps more marked by cooperation. Rather than dominance and oppression these relations seemed to be filled with love and respect.

The Taizé community express and practise their worldview through the prayer rituals and community life. The individual experiences that are accounted for in this thesis are fundamental to religion. But also community and the feeling of union is fundamental to religion. And Taizé lives and practise this duality through both their prayers and their community life.

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More musical examples may be found at Taizés' homepage, online source:  
[[http://www.taize.fr/en\\_article681.html](http://www.taize.fr/en_article681.html)]

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## **Attachments:**

### **Attachment 1. List of Personal Interviews and conversations:**

Personal interview 1, anonymous. 07. March 2010, Lia Gård.

Personal interview 2, anonymous. 08. March 2010, Lia Gård.

Personal interview 3, anonymous. 13. January 2011, Taizé communauté.

Personal interview 4, anonymous. 16. January 2011, Taizé communauté.

Brother Stephen, personal conversation. 21. January 2011, Taizé communauté.

Brother Jean-Marie, personal interview. 20. January 2011, Taizé communauté.

Brother Alois, group conversation 1, 14. January 2011, Taizé communauté.

Brother Alois, group conversation 2, 21. January 2011, Taizé communauté.



Attachment 2. CD Recording, list of contents:

From the evening prayer in Taizé communauté 21.01.2011

Sviaty Boze, no 109

Alleluia 18, no 75

Scripture reading; French and English

Sung response to Scripture

Scripture reading; Korean and German

Tui Amoris Ignem, no 14

Silence

Kyrie 21, no 91

Psalm

Spoken blessing, in English, Korean, and French

Exaudi orationem meam

Wait for the Lord